Acting as Missionaries: The Religious Self in Intercultural Practice: An Approach from Action Theory and Cultural Psychology

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Table of Contents

Modern Means, Classic Goals: By Way of Introduction 7
Jacob A. Belzen, Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Lifetime and Eternity 19
Jens Brockmeier, Berlin (Germany)

Life Stories and Philosophies of Life: A Perspective for Research in Psychology of Religion 39
Ulrike Popp-Baier, Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Toward a Multidimensional Conception of Faith Development: Deconversion Narratives in Biographical Context 75
Barbara Keller, Cologne (Germany)

The Night is the Mother of Day: Methodological Comments on Three Cases of Religious Visions as Suicide Prevention 95
Antoon Geels, Lund (Sweden)

Past and Present Religious Stories

Autobiography, Psychic Functioning and Mental Health: The Role of Religion in Personal Life 117
Jacob A. Belzen, Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Methodist Ritual Mourning and the Resolution of Traumatic Grief: The Case of Richard Moss 159
Keith Haartman, Toronto (Canada)

The Personal and Beyond: Simone Weil and the Necessity/Limits of Biography 187
Mark Freeman, Worcester (USA)

From Paradise to Paradox: The Psychospiritual Journey of John Heider 209
Jeffrey Kripal, Houston (USA)

Different Religions, Different Cultures, Different Stories

The Place of Religion in the Experience of War-Orphans as Constructed in their Life Stories 239
Amia Lieblich, Jerusalem (Israel)

The Redemptive Self, Generativity, and American Christians at Midlife: Explorations of the Life Stories of Evangelical and Mainline Protestants 255
Dan P. McAdams and Michelle Albaugh, Evanston (USA)

Spirituality, Narrative, and Character: Two Priests on Paths to Spiritual Maturity and Integrity in Late Life 287
Melvin E. Miller, Montpelier (USA)

Acting as Missionaries: The Religious Self in Intercultural Practice: An Approach from Action Theory and Cultural Psychology 319
Jürgen Straub and Maik Arnold, Chemnitz (Germany)

Afterword

Reflections of a Narrative Researcher 369
Ruthellen Josselson, Baltimore (USA)

Notes on contributors 377

Index 381

Acting as Missionaries: The Religious Self in Intercultural Practice

An Approach from Action Theory and Cultural Psychology

Jürgen Straub and Maik Arnold

> I consider 'morality' a system of beliefs which corresponds to the believer's living conditions.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche

> Belief (. . .) is one of the strongest motivations; it may bring out the most sublime or the most pernicious in humanity. Martyrs as well as torturers and hangmen, saints and healers as well as seducers, visionaries as well as blind men, artists, church builders as well as iconoclasts – all acted and suffered for their own unwavering convictions.
>
> Ernst E. Boesch

The narrated self, the self as story-teller

Every so often, people will focus on and thematize their own lives and themselves. A widely used mode of self-thematization is story-telling. To be able to understand and come up with stories, including stories about oneself, requires participation in a social environment where stories in all forms, from rudimentary episodes to complex plots, are circulating everywhere. An episodic or autobiographical memory can only be developed when the individual is immersed in a narrative practice, as Katherine Nelson (1989, 1993, 1996; Nelson & Fivush, 2001, 2004) and many others have shown. Memory, as part of the brain, is in part a sociocultural achievement.[1]

Telling stories about ourselves becomes an integral part of our lives quite early. Individuals remember and anticipate their lives, they present and flesh out their selves in stories. These stories deal with the past, the present, and the future, with experiences and hopes, past sufferings and wished-for happiness, real events and things imagined. They recapitulate and assess what was and what is, they imagine what could and what should be. Rational reconstruction and analysis go hand in hand with emotional turmoil and complex evaluations in which thought and emotion, conscious decisions and subconscious relations form a strong liaison. Ernst Boesch (2005) considers story-telling one of the most

[1] This was noted early on by Frederic Bartlett (1932) and Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1985); for a contemporary overview see Markowitsch and Welzer (2005), Welzer (2001).

psychologically crucial ways to bring the self and the world into balance and create a certain amount of stability. When he talks of Homo narrator, he recognizes the universal importance of this manner of speech. Over the course of humankind's history, as well as over the lifetime of an individual, the narrator steps onto the "stage of life" using a variety of guises and props. Depending on culturally determined choices and habits, repertoires and routines, he makes use of different symbolic forms and means to articulate his life and self. (Brockmeier, 2000, 2003; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 1987, 1990; McAdams, 1988, 1993; Echterhoff & Straub, 2003, 2004).

There are many psychologically relevant functions of story-telling.[2] For the purposes of this paper, the following four seem to be of particular interest:

(1) People communicate who they are, who they have become, and who they wish to be, by – among other things – telling stories. Narratives focusing directly on one's own experiences and interests gain special importance. Still, indirect references to the self in and through stories dealing with unfamiliar experiences and expectations (as, for example, in stories of past generations), too, may be significant. An autobiographical narrator situates the changes of his or her self within a sequence of events, happenings, and actions. Here, the dynamic and transitory self (Straub and Renn, 2002) emerges within a story which communicates, reflects, forms, and in part constitutes the self through the very act of narration. (This is true, in any case, when the self is understood as a hermeneutically conveyed construct, a symbolic and linguistic construct in particular.) This important function of story-telling has been the focus of much analysis. It has received attention in relevant theories and in empirical research projects, among them projects focusing on the psychology of religion. Probably the most well-known in this field are conversion narratives, which relevant analyses show to be organized typically according to a certain narrative pattern that describes a radical change in personality, i.e., the emergence of "another person".[3]

[2] Cp. the extensive list in Straub (2005a, p. 62ff) which primarily deals with historical narratives, as well as other contributions to the field of narrative psychology, such as Echterhoff and Straub (2003, 2007), Bruner (1990), McAdams (1988, 1993). These texts also offer discussions of additional pragmatic aspects of story-telling, they attempt to define the structural characteristics of story-telling, which are necessary to develop a theoretical concept of story-telling and define ways to differentiate it from other modes of talking/writing and equivalent objectivations.

[3] There is extensive literature specifically about the psychology of conversion (c. e.g., Popp-Baier, 1998; McAdams, in this publication; Belzen, 1999); it grows endlessy when relevant works from related disciplines like sociology (in particular sociological studies about biography) are taken into account (see: Knoblauch, Krech & Wohlrab-Sahr, 1998; Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999). Belzen (in this publication) draws attention to the fact that

(2) A second, just as important function of story-telling has not yet attracted the same kind of attention as the first: often the above mentioned self-narratives provide reasons (of various degrees of complexity) for or explanations of actions and/or their implicit convictions and orientations etc.) (Straub, 1998a, 1999a, 1999b).[4] The purpose of this function may be predominantly practical-performative, like justifying an action or apologizing for one. Yet it may also satisfy a primary, cognitive-epistemical need, such as haunts scientists, too. They may devote themselves (however "over-determined" and irreducible to one single cause or origin it may be) to the genesis of one action and, related to this, its possibly multi-layered, polyvalent[5] meanings.

Autobiographical narratives not only describe what was, they also explain *uno actu* how the reported, described happenings and events came about. When writing about an action (or about the refraining from an action), these kinds of narratives explain why a person did (thought, felt etc.) so, why he will do so or plans to do so, why he refrained from doing so and perhaps continues to refrain from doing so, and what that all of it means. Often the narratives' descriptive "elements" cannot be separated from the explanatory ones. Narratives are descriptive by nature and, at least when describing an event extensively, they are auto-explanatory.[6] Also, they are able to integrate and work with other, non-narrative forms of explanation. When narratives offer explanations for actions, they are the "best account" (Taylor, 1981) when compared to other (narrative or other) explanations.[7] This is evident even in some of the contributions to this volume. Thus, for example, Belzen concludes that an understanding explanation

psychological studies are neither interested nor authorized to make judgements about the religious or spiritual meaning of such conversions. Rather, they focus on the psychological or psychosocial changes, that is, on aspects of a person's transformation which can be psychologically assessed. He (with McAdams) distinguishes between three levels of analysis: firstly, *dispositions* (like openness to experience, conscentiousness, extracersion, agreeableness, neuroticism), secondly, *personal issues and orientations* (like life and action-oriented goals, plans, and strategies), and finally, *identity* and *self*, conveyed and represented in the form of a life story (which goes beyond and integrates level two and three). This story, in its different parts and as a whole, gives meaning and importance to the subjects. The empirical analyses presented below address similar dimensions, but do not deal specifically with conversion experiences.

[4] For the concept of action, c. Straub (1998a, 1999a).

[5] For the concept of "polyvalence," see: Boesch (1991). For reasons of space, it is not possible to present a satisfying definition of the concept of hermeneutical, understanding explanations [verstehende Erklärung] used here. For more detailed discussions, see, Angehrn (1985); Schurz (1988); Straub (1999a, 1999b).

[6] As shown for historical narrative and explanation by Danto (1965)

[7] Cp. to the typology of action explanations developed elsewhere (Straub 1999a), according to which the model of intentional (goal-oriented, functional) or rule-guided action is decisive as well as the narrative scheme.

(verstehende Erklärung) for religious actions and attitudes – in short, for all protestations of belief – always needs more than just references to an abstract and generally defined religion or religiosity. To simply be a Christian – Catholic or Protestant[8] – a Muslim or a Buddhist means and explains little or nothing. This is almost equally true for other categories used to label people. Which means that, "(i)t is always important to check how individual religiosity is related to the cultural and subcultural 'world' in which the person lives her life, and how it is structured within the person's broader psychic life. (. . .) To understand something about a person's religiosity (. . .), it is important to focus attention on the individual and to immerse oneself in her personal life story, as articulated in her autobiography" (Belzen, in this publication, p. 35).

This is also true for religious acts. It is true for each action which is connected pragma-semantically with the religious belief, even when the focus is not on the action's individuality or uniqueness, but on its typicality and categorizability. The understanding explanation of a categorized religious act – for example, approaching others in a persuasive manner with missionary intent – needs a biographical-theoretical perspective, too. This perspective, then, brings categorizable patterns (which are often already categorized by the narrator) into view, which make plausible how the action in question came about and which meanings this action – as part of a complex life form and related to specific language games – may hold. The categorization of life stories, of life experiences and expectations as well as of the autobiographical narratives they symbolically represent, depend upon cultural life forms, according to which some things are possible and others are not. Not everything can simply happen in each and every life and be turned retrospectively into a narrative's theme. (Nor can everything be imagined in a premeditated look back from before the events, in the grammatical tense of futurum exactum as "future past".) Cultural ways of life both open up and limit what is real and what is possible.[9]

(3) The peculiar structure and dynamic of the functions upon which we have elaborated so far, at times permeate narratives in a unique way, which cannot be replaced by any other form of (language-dependent) communication. In

[8] Regarding the many Christian denominations, it is almost impossible to speak of a specifically Protestant mission, and even less so, to speak of *the* Protestant. In Germany, there can still be observed – at least in the public perception – a deep internal rift that splits the Christian Church into two fractions ("Catholics" and "Protestants"). But since the 18th century the term "Protestantism" has come to mean in German-speaking countries, too, all such movements of modern Christianity which see themselves as a third line of religious tradition separate from the Roman-Catholic and the Orthodox Church. However, as we could not yet come up with a suitable alternative term for the "Protestant" missionaries that are the focus of this study, we chose to stick for now with the wide-spread usage of the term "Protestant" meaning a member of the *Evangelische Kirche* in Germany.

[9] For the concept of "culture," cp. Boesch (1991), Boesch & Straub (2007), Bruner (1990), Straub (1999a, 2003).

self-narratives a person creates his self within his extension in time and, consequently, as a "unity" of the own self's differences in time.[10] This is another, again very fundamental function of self-narratives. As Paul Ricoeur noted in his profound studies, it is the "inner" or "intrinsic" connection between (a specifically human) time and story-telling which turns the narrative self-thematization into an exceptional form of speech. Putting oneself within one's own temporality, mutability, and mortality – thus, within a constant "becoming" – means situating one's self within a past, present, and future. This also holds true when this process of becoming results in no changes in the self. In a sense, always remaining the same still means living in time.

Past, present, and future reciprocally reflect upon each other, yet they can be distinguished only from the viewpoint of an "analyzer". Their intrinsic characteristics make them dependent on each other, which becomes evident in the act of narration and in the narratives themselves. Not only does the past determine the present (and the future). The past is a mental, "memory-based" construct that depends as much upon (ever changing) interpretations in the present as on expectations of the future. The past changes to correspond to new experiences, whether these experiences in fact just happened or are still anticipated, dreaded, or hoped for. Ian Hacking (1995) poignantly speaks of a certain uncertainty of the past. Pasts, just like actions, are meaning-structured phenomena, and as such they find themselves "under a description" (a phrase from Anscombe's famous formula; Anscombe, 1957). As the present is passing, past and future are altered, or rather: our descriptions of the past are altered (and it is these descriptions in which we are interested; we are not dealing with past, present, or future events which simply are what they were or will be, no matter our symbolic representations of them). New experiences alter past experiences as well as a person's expectations. Life narratives not only recall the passing of time,

[10] This unity should, however, not be misinterpreted, in the sense of, perhaps, an elimination of difference and heterogeneity. Rather, the Self as *unity of its differences* is a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (Ricoeur, 1994) symbolized in narrative. The narrative form *creates* a unity, without presupposing the persistence of a substratum or a substance, and without denying the internal differentiality and heterogeneity of a life steeped in contingencies. Each life and also its symbolic representation in form of a narrative bears witness to the *self*-withdrawal constitutive of the self (cp. Ricken, 2002; Straub, 2002, 2004b). This aspect, too, was discussed exhaustively mostly in debates theorizing identity. A specific bias often lingered in the background of these debates, namely the allegation that with the concept of a "personal identity" – or any other term available! – the no longer feasible, out-dated perception of a subject "identical with itself" had entered discussion. This was counteracted with the theoretical concept of a "non-identical," "pluralistic," "dialogical," "multiple," "diasporic" etc. self. But a sufficiently complex (psychological, sociological) concept of personal identity has nothing to do with a simple, diachronic and synchronic oneness of "something" with itself (cp. Straub & Renn, 2002). Such a trivializing interpretation was rejected by all of the more ambitious psychological and sociological theories developed in the 19th and 20th century (Straub, 1991, 2002, 2004a).

they are also situated within time (and, consequently, within changing contexts); as symbolic representations they can only ever be conceived of in the plural (cp. the contribution by Belzen, in this volume).[11]

(4) Telling self-narratives means "presenting" oneself within one's temporal, historical, and biographical extension, that which exists beyond our bodies. However, the function of self-narratives is not only, and not even primarily that of description. They are never meant to be listened to and read as simple descriptions of a life. Understood as narrative self-thematizations within a discourse-pragmatic perspective, they are extremely complex speech acts imbued with a performative power of their own. "Telling one's self" is more than and different from giving a detached and thoughtful description of one's life. In the act of story-telling, the person creates and presents his self, which is then *likely* to be recognized by others. But regardless, a demand to be recognized exists regardless of whether it is met: self-narratives demand recognition by others. This is true for all possible modes of autobiographical-narrative self-thematization:

> Justificatory confessions, through which the performatively raised claim to one's own identity can be authenticated, are not to be confused with the description, always selective, of an individual. The literary genre of the letter, the confession, the diary, the autobiography, the *Bildungsroman*, and the didactically recited self-reflection (. . .) testifies to the transformed illocutionary mode: it is not a matter of *reports* and descriptions from the perspective of an observer, not even of *self-observations*; rather, it is a matter of interested *presentations of self*, with which a complex claim presented to second persons is justified – a claim to recognition of the irreplaceable identity of an ego manifesting itself in a conscious [and not so conscious, J.S./M.A.] way of life. This claim is brought to bear in the performative attitude, and the attempt to make it plausible by means of a totalizing draft of one's life will always remain fragmentary; but this attempt must not be confused with the never completed descriptive endeavour of characterizing a subject through to totality of all statements that could apply to it. (Habermas, 1992, p. 167)

The same is true for everyday, oral self-narratives, including the spontaneously improvised story so well-loved in narrative interviews. These narratives remain fragmentary, and in most cases they are not about the "whole" life or the "whole" person anyway. The story-telling self acts selectively, it wishes to be recognized (or fears rejection). Certain experiences and events are moved to the center, the focus of the narrative is concentrated on certain fields of action, certain areas of life – like, for example, the religious belief of the narrator – and related events, happenings, activities, and actions.

[11] Representations – a problematic which can only be hinted at here – are constructs but not arbitrary inventions. Autobiographical self-narratives refer back to past events without ever being able to realistically depict them. These thoughts are fully fledged out in complex philosophical theories of referentiality.

Thus, we conclude our reminiscing about the important psycho-social functions that are so evidently fulfilled by self-narratives – as will become apparent in the autobiographical narratives that we discuss below. Our approach to these narratives differs from others. Psychological research of biography is rarely interested in the full story of an entire life. Just like the narrators themselves in their everyday lives, research has been satisfied with single stories from the narrators' lives. Of course, these stories are all part of one life-narrative, and the narrator might even weave them together to make this broader background felt through hints and selective glimpses. At times, autobiographical narrators build huge story arcs of different events, experiences, and expectations; they weave episodes, which on first glance seem entirely disconnected, into a meaningfully structured whole.

Here "emplotment" (German "Fabelbildung," French "intrigue") creates a temporally complex web of meanings. Beginning and end are set contingently, an irrefutable demonstration that each narrative, each emplotment, is a poetic act (White, 1987; Straub, 1989, 1993, 1996). Whether narratives are answerable to imagination alone, as is all fiction, or whether they refer to supposedly real events, as do most prominently historical and autobiographical accounts – they all involve making choices about what to tell and what not to tell.

Biographical narratives are bound to place, to point-of-view – they are selective constructions. Each symbolic representation of a life, each "bio" (biography), cannot help but be distinct from the life it represents. There are many reasons for this. Thus, each autobiographical representation is part of a whole that by its very nature cannot be represented. Life can never be grasped in its entirety.[12] Incidentally, such a claim of totality would also hardly be useful. Ulrike Popp-Baier reminds us (in her contribution to this volume) that usually we are not all that interested in our life as a whole. In his everyday life, the story-telling Self recounts one episode at one time, another episode some other time, but never "all," never his "whole life" or his "entire life story". A depressing incident may be a reason to thematize one's life and self, or an upcoming decision that needs to be carefully thought through, the need to concentrate and find a new orientation during crucial events, or the wish to justify a deed, to apologize for it, to understand it, or rather, to explain it with understanding. Or perhaps an autobiographical story, especially one that covers more than just a few episodes, is told because the narrator was asked to tell it by (researching) psychologists wishing to do biographical-narrative interviews.

[12] Life narratives are told retrospectively – anticipations are nothing but retrospections cast imaginatively into the future. Thus a narrative about an entire life is simply not possible as life necessarily includes death. And, as we all know, there are no autobiographies from beyond the grave. Also, philosophical critics have noted that there are good ethical and moral reasons to refuse the cultural imperative aimed at one's entire life, "Tell yourself!" (Thomä, 1998).

Missionary action in biographical research and cultural psychology – An overview of what follows

Such interviews are conducted, transcribed, and analyzed for very different purposes (Deppermann & Lucius-Hoene, 2004), among which might be the explanation and analysis of the meanings of actions, as we have already described in detail above. Interest, as in this paper, may focus on one particular type of human activity (and on possible internal sub-differentiations of that type). The following thoughts are part of the research tradition that deals with narrative biographies, a tradition influenced by symbolic action theory and cultural psychology. Of particular interest are the missionary activities of Protestant believers, or to put it more generally, those Protestants' actions and orientations, experiences, and expectations that pragma-semantically lead up to the acceptance of a missionary calling. Missionary activities whose intention is to propagate religious beliefs are obviously fundamentally shaped by culture. The possible meanings of these activities are thus as much cultural as personal.

The following discussion is devoted to these manifold meanings. We will talk very briefly and selectively about the concept and the reality of "mission" (3). Then we will present the first, rather tentative results of our empirical research (4). We will focus on selected examples that have brought to our attention some possible meanings of missionary actions within intercultural contexts, which are not visible at first glance. "Mission" can mean very different things for different people (e.g., from different cultural backgrounds, religions, and within different contexts). And just like "religion,"[13] or rather, religious beliefs, the psychological meanings of "mission" can only be understood by studying the experiences and actions, the practices and symbolic representations of those who are doing missionary work (or who are the focus of missionary work), and who thus go through experiences and cherish hopes that are important for their life stories and their selves.

After presenting our analyses of selected statements and passages from narrative interviews, we will conclude by briefly turning to the question of what the activities in question could possibly have to do with "intercultural competence," or whether such skills and knowledge are irreconcilable and incompatible with missionary work (5). Among many things, this analysis refers back to the demand described above, the story-teller's demand to be recognized as narrated

[13] Belzen (in this volume) summarizes an accurate insight when he writes: "It has been well noted that as a concept 'religion' is actually too inclusive; too much can be classified within it to be able to work with analytically. (. . .) Religion as such, or a specific form of religion such as a Christian denomination or sub-denomination, does not 'do' anything and bears no relation to psychic development or to something like mental health. It is religious symbols, especially practices, or better yet: it is persons involved in religion who sort out the effects" (p. 33).

and narrating self. In such a culturally diverse world as ours – liberated, pluralized, and open to very individualistic life-styles – an assertion like this will always be chancy. This is even more true for people in a secular society who have dedicated their lives to a religious mission or are about to accept that calling. Which is not to say that "religion," and "mission" in particular, is an indicator of a minority position within society, in danger of being stigmatized and discriminated against. This is certainly not the case. In "Western" societies, Christians, as well as members of other religious groups, enjoy for the most part – although not to an equal extent – a high reputation and goodwill while on the legal side freedom of religion is guaranteed.[14] Even so, the missionary zeal of some religious people is no longer well regarded by the general populace. It is by no means an accident that the term "mission" is shunned even in places where Christians are openly demanding stronger evangelization movements, i.e., more missions.[15]

Mission in dispute – Idea and reality of religious expansion

Securing the enduring existence and development of religions and world views requires geographical, political, and ideological proliferation as well as attracting new followers. In this context, the term "mission" (from the Latin missio) is often used, which according to a 16th century source, stems from the missionary oath *votum de missionibus* of the Jesuit envoys, who were ordered by their church to convert the "unbaptized" and win them over to their own religion and community of belief (Gensichen, 1986). In the field of religious sciences and related disciplines, the term "mission" means the organized expansion of religions and world views (cp. among others, Wrogemann, 2006; Ström, 1994).

For the longest time, the emergence and development of the concept of "mission" took place in European, i.e., "Western" cultures. The use of this allegedly universally applicable term in order to describe religions, world views, and ways of life other than Christian has often been criticized, it was warningly pointed out that this constituted a "nostrocentered" description presuming an "ideal

[14] Much more could be said, but for the purpose of this paper it is of little consequence whether the pronouncement of a "renaissance of religion" is justified or not. (It's not as if secularisation – however it can be defined and understood – had ever made religion disappear; rather, one should talk about structural changes of religious experience and a transformation of the modes of participation in religious communities; cp. Popp-Baier, 1998). Empirically evident is the fact that there is an increase in societal discourses which focus on religious belief or "God". The recent trip of Pope Benedict XVI. through his Bavarian homeland is a good illustration of this phenomenon.

[15] This happened numerous times during the last stay of the head of the Catholic Church in Germany in September of 2006. The word "mission" was nowhere to be heard, although it was all about mission, and the Pope himself acted as a missionary.

form of mission" (cp. Matthes, 1992, 1993; Wrogemann, 2006). In what follows we retain this (Christianity-centered) traditional understanding of mission, when we make a couple of cursory notes about several key aspects of missionary thought. Only in the sections dealing with empirical material are such distinctions considered, i.e., whenever our interview partners themselves thematize their own missionary actions in their respective individual polyvalences.

The Christian mission sees itself as a universal sign of the vitality of its church. Within the belief system, it is based on the incarnation of the "Divine logos," the humanity of Christ. The history of humankind is conceptualized as a history of salvation. Mission is understood as an integral part of this history, missionaries are committed to fulfilling "the will of God" (Bürkle, 1994, p. 59).

The stated goals of "mission" changed during the course of history, with a severe shift of emphasis in the 20th century (Bürkle, 1994, p. 60f): In the traditional theological understanding of someone like Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), the purpose of mission was to found new religious communities at a grassroots level. Warneck emphasized the existential change of the individual missionary through the conversion experience (the common metaphor indicates that this was a change of power: "He who was lost is saved"). In the more evangelical missions, the personal calling to be a missionary was even more important. Then the Second Vatican Council decreed that the goal of mission work was seen in the fact that God the Father sent his only Son to the world "at that one time for the salvation of all" (Vaticanian Council II, 1966, Art. 3). Mission work would bring to humanity "integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind, and opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation" (John Paul II, 1991, Art. 11). The ecumenical discussion about mission obviously led to a new focus on the Holy Trinity (Joest, 1995).

The practice of missionary proselytizing means proclaiming the word of God in all areas (parish work, social welfare, medical and educational services etc.) of the lives of those in need of mission. As a "servant of his church," a missionary leaves his home and his culture to proclaim the Christian Gospel. He leaves for the world, and in close cooperation with the local leaders of the church, follows his calling. If he enters new territory where he cannot fall back on already existing institutional structures and resources, his mission work means building a Church institution. Missionaries are often the ones who open up fields of action suitable for institutionalized church work, and then step back from being actively involved in the work of the new parish. (Müller & Sundermeier, 1987, p. 278).

The mission stations are the central location and starting point for communicating the Christian Gospel. To establish a two-sided dialogue it is necessary to form personal relationships with the local population (families, kinship groups, colleagues), make arrangements with local churches (for invitations, necessary

visas, etc.), and acquire or possess a good knowledge of the local language, or at least of the lingua franca, if there is one (Margull, 1986, p. 982).

The traditional goals and means of the Christian mission are changing, at least in Europe. The reasons can be found in the advancing secularization of numerous "modern" societies, individualization, (religious) differentiation and pluralization – which are all part of the increasing cultural exchange worldwide and the growth of non-Christian religions and world views (Burke, 2000). In recent decades, the "young churches" of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have gained greater independence and have become missionary societies themselves. The reality of missionary work world-wide has become much more complex. The classical "pioneer-missionary" who testifies for his God in front of the "heathens," works towards their conversion, thus contributing to making his community a thriving and active parish, has become a rarity indeed.

The term "mission," then, does not mean a universal practice of missionary work that is the same everywhere. Many of the very stereotypical preconceptions of missionary work are misleading, and even more so when the term is used to include more than just the specifically Christian mission. As is well-known, other religions and world views, too, have brought forth their own expansive movements, which are usually not globally organized, but that steadily continue their work nonetheless. Other than tribal and folk religions, all of the so-called world religions (Ström, 1994; Glasenapp, 1997) insist on their own traditional, universalistic Gospel and work hard to spread their particular belief in a transcendental reality and "last truth" (Rosenkranz, 1986). Their claim to offer religious truth for all the world is met by already existing regional and trans-regional, traditional cultures and religions. Several strategies are available to missionaries in such a situation, in particular adaptation, syncretism, and exclusion (cp. Sundermeier, 1996, 2003).

Incidentally, the (religious, Christian) term mission is – and often rather naïvely – extended to non-religious matters and contexts. Frequently the term mission is used to mean almost the same thing as colonial expansion and imperialism. There is no doubt that the expansion of religions into every corner of the globe and throughout human history occurred within a highly ambivalent context, one that was rarely free from acts of physical, psychological, or symbolic violence. This is still true today. The spiritual – and not only spiritual – encounter between different cultures, peoples, and within particular religious communities has always gone hand in hand with radical changes in power structures and ruling authorities (and for a long time this meant that European claims to ideological and political, cultural and social power were pushed through). Currently, a broad range of academic disciplines is participating in the reinterpretation of the history of missionary work. Exhaustive research is being conducted on missionary involvement in histories of violence, colonization, and terror (cp. among others, Heyden, 2000; Boesch, 2005; Wagner, 1994).

It is more than evident that only "insiders" have anything good to say about both the term and the reality of "mission," which is widely perceived as a rather dubious enterprise. A diverse range of often very good and well regarded ideas and projects, programs, and practices come under the label of "mission," still, missionary work today is confronted with severe problems of legitimization. Today's missionaries are, more than at any other time in history, forced to justify their calling and their work. In some regions of the world, missionary work is both very important and a highly sensitive issue. Missionaries are easily suspected of turning human beings into the objects of dubious, violent manipulations. Subtle forms of persuasion and conversion have always accompanied missionaries' more drastic interventions in local societies. And time and again, the violent character of missionary work has been explicitly justified by the Church. Think, for example, of the degrading labeling of Native Americans as idolaters, cannibals, and sodomites in Francisco López de Gómara's *Hispania Victrix: First and Second Parts of the General History of the Indies* (1552). Or think of Ginés de Sepúlvedas, who justified the war against the Spaniards because he (referring to Aristotle) thought them to be inferior "Untermenschen." These and many similar statements show that the "discovery of America" was a "conquest of the other" (Todorov, 1989), as numerous critics have pointed out. The Spanish conquistadors were accused of cruelty and, in a complementary move, the "indigenous" ways of life were vindicated. Thus, for example, Bartolomé de Las Casas, one of the first to write on the still popular theme of "barbaric Europe," captured "The Tears of the Indians" (1552). All these works, too, have long been an essential part of the written record of missionary Christianity (cp. Mahn-Lot, 1982; Todorov, 1989).

Among other things, this historiography determined the cultural background of today's (Christian) mission work. The young German Protestants we interviewed all referred several times to this historical context which – as we will show in the next part of the paper – seems to be very present to them. They contextualize and temporalize their missionary involvement by placing it within the collective history of humankind where religious missions left their cruel marks. This is yet another fine example of the interlacing of autobiography and historiography, when biographical and historical narratives are put in significant relations to each other (Straub, 1996, 1998b/2005a; Kölbl, 2004; Kölbl & Straub, 2003). The Christians we interviewed follow their missionary call with religious devotion and loyalty with respect to their church, but they reject the violence which in the past and present has been carried out in the name of such devotion and loyalty. (For this violence is still part of some missionary work today, even though the forms may have changed.) This is but one aspect that shapes their religious self-image and view of the world and gives a meaningful context for their missionary actions. But it is an important aspect, not least because it reflects a general tendency of our times. We'll come back to that point.

Representative empirical analyses, initial results

In the following, we are not concerned with ethical or moral aspects of missionary actions. Our research is guided by our interest in *psychology*. From this point-of-view we ask questions like, for example: What do we, in fact, mean when we talk about missionary activities (what do the subjects mean, the scientific researchers?) What is the intent and impact, and what are the concrete actions of a person who proselytizes other people, often in remote areas and under severe hardship (whether he or she is a successful missionary or not)? What kind of symbolic actions does mission work consist of, what are the psycho-social functions they fulfill, independent of whether the subjects are aware of them or not? How do people come to missionary work in the first place, and why do they stick with it? Finally, what does it mean to understand missionary action as intercultural practice?

In what is following, we will try to provide some answers to these questions. We do not think of our answers as final or complete; what we describe is by no means the result of an exhaustive analysis. What we will present are the first tentative results of the systematic interpretation of three selected biographical-narrative interviews in which missionaries, who are about to start or have just started their work, talk about their education, missionary training, their first tour to another country, and their experiences, expectations, accomplishments, and disappointments in foreign countries in general.[16]

[16] The evaluation method of this interpretation follows the methodological principles based on a hermeneutics of symbolic action theory and cultural psychology (Straub, 1999a, 2006). This approach is in some important aspects supported by the so-called documentary interpretation (Bohnsack, 2003) and comparative analysis (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1991; Kelle, 1994; Nohl, 2007). The written material is the result of narrative interviews (Schütze, 1987). They were transcribed *verbatim* and are here presented in a translation from the written German. The interviewers strictly adhered to the methodological principles of openness, being a stranger, and communication (Appelsmeyer, Kochinka & Straub, 1997; Hoffmann-Riem, 1980; Lamnek, 1996), thus the way the narratives are thematically structured and how they are told linguistically represents to a high degree the narrators' own sense of significance as well as their expressive abilities. This kind of responses were made possible by the initial questions eliciting the narrative in the interview. The interviewees were asked to "simply" tell about their own adventures, or rather, their experiences, especially experiences made abroad while being trained to be missionary (or further vocational training) or during the missionary practice. The eliciting question did not simply ask about "which specific and new experiences did you make abroad when you look back on everything that happened in your life" (interview with Ansgar, p. 1, lines 21–23), but encouraged the interviewee also to "begin where it all started, when you became interested in missionary work" (interview with Ansgar, p. 1, line 25). This standard eliciting question could be slightly changed, depending on situation and personality of the interviewee, but basically it was asked at the beginning of each interview. Then followed the autobiographical narration

The three interviews chosen for this presentation lasted between one and a half and a couple of hours. At the time of the interviews, our interview partners, (two women and one man), were 43 (Ansgar), 26 (Ursula), and 32 (Susanne) years old. Ansgar was trained as painter, and as a so-called Campus Worker he had been involved in religious and church work for the previous 15 years. He had traveled several times to Russia (or other member states of GUS), each trip lasting between one to six months. Ursula has a diploma in social work and spent four years in the Philippines. Susanne lived in Russia for two years. All three of these partners had completed additional vocational training offered by the Protestant Church and had participated in missionary tours.

The focus of all the narratives used for this presentation is – among other things – the self of the interviewees. Still, numerous "significant others" (G. H. Mead), prominent among them members of other, foreign societies and cultures as much as the communication, co-operation, and co-existence side by side with them, are also part of these narratives. Analyzing the experiences and expectations embedded within the biographical narrations of our interview partners, we mean to gain insights into a *psychology of belief*, focusing in particular on the psycho-social meanings and functions of missionary action in the context of intercultural religious practice. This action we regard, like any human action, as *polyvalent* (Boesch, 1991; Boesch & Straub, 2007; Straub, 2001). This term from Boesch's symbolic action theory and cultural psychology refers to a highly complex web of cultural, social and individual (autobiographical), denotative, and (especially) connotative meanings. Actions are always situated within pragma-semantical networks. Boesch speaks of "webs of meaning" which can be examined with the method of connotation analysis or related methods of interpretation (cp. Boesch & Straub, 2007; Straub, 1999a, 2001, 2006; Straub & Weidemann, 2007). It is those very meanings psychology needs to concentrate on in order to be able to make meaningful assessments of actions and happenings, orientations, expectations, and experiences. Such meanings are almost always in a pragma-semantical relationship with the *shaping*, the stabilization or transformation of *the self and its boundaries*. By performing actions, and while they are performing them, human beings strive toward , and thus they have an impact, whether intentional or accidental. Self-impact is not only manifested in the "outer"

tracing the road towards involvement with the religious mission. – For more information, please refer to the dissertation project of Maik Arnold (Chemnitz University of Technology, Chair of Intercultural Communication, http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/ikk/ik/files/de/content-35.html [last access: 15.01.2007]). So far, the database consists of five autobiographical-narrative interviews. Additional interviews are planned including interviews with members of the "target groups" of missionary work as well as people (from Russia) who were converted by missionary efforts. Furthermore, field trips with participating observation of missionary practice as well as group discussions, also with different subjects, are in their planning stages.

Table 1 Thematic heading of the comparative interpretations

Biographical backgrounds: paths towards becoming a missionary
Caritas: altruism under the banner of love and charity
To prove oneself: stability in faith
Secular desires and hedonistic proclivities
The time in the field: reasons to stay
"Staying abroad": broadening occupational perspectives
Strings of the heart: love for country and people, fun and "pleasure gain"
Experiences of difference I: Life without a worlds of consumptions – positive alternative visions for materialistic societies of affluence and individualistic "fake worlds of glamour"
Experiences of difference II: Life without stress – positive alternative visions to time pressures and achievement orientation at home
Experiences of difference III: sociableness and hospitality – positive alternative visions to the isolated seclusion of private spheres
Experiences of difference IV: authentic emotions and powerful religiosity – positive alternative visions to a rationalistic culture
Cultural difference, intercultural communication and competence
Everyday cooperation and coexistence beyond cultural boundaries
Differences that remain, necessary arguments
Adjustment, combined arrangements, and "third spaces"
Persuasive communication and violence: mission as helping people to help themselves or patronizing conversion
Struggles for acceptance, dominance, and enforcement of one's own culture
Missionary action as strengthening the self and a heightened sense of the self

world over which a person gains influence. With each act people shape their own selves and, in particular, their *potential for further action* (Boesch, 1991).

Various aspects of what we have just discussed can be seen in the following passages. Because of space restrictions we can only occasionally quote directly from the interviews. Our interpretations and comparative analyses are not extensive, and sometimes we restrict our representations to mere hints. The first results of our comparative interpretations of these autobiographical narratives are grouped under the following thematic headings (see table one):

Biographical backgrounds – Paths towards becoming a missionary

There are many different answers to the question of how someone reaches a point in life where he or she wishes to participate in religious missionary work. (Here, we completely ignore the biographical paths towards becoming a religious person.) This might sound trite, but the willingness to promulgate one's own belief and to actually participate in missionary practice can be due to a whole

range of *possible* biographical developments in which categorizable intentions, motives and ambitions have their origins.

It is no surprise that in the autobiographical narratives we use, on-going, implicit developments are present as well as individual key events that are assigned a prominent biographical significance by our interview partners (see below). Often there is also an element of chance, a "motivational trace" in one's life-story.[17] Biographical developments do not follow one simple decision and fixed plan – even allowing for the fact that intentionally acting subjects may take an active part in the shaping of their lives and development (cp. Brandtstädter, 2001; Brandtstädter & Greve, 2007).

According to the religious interpretation pattern used frequently by our interview partners, the path of one's life follows the guidance and bidding of God: "I'd say, God simply led me there" (Ursula, p.1, line 53–54). God may not play dice, but he provides certain events in each life, events that people *may construe* as coincidence in hindsight – even as *non-accidental coincidence* – which must seem quite paradoxical against the background of the religious interpretation pattern just mentioned. To this category of nonaccidental coincidence belong events like supposedly chance meetings with other people that turned the interviewees' lives in an unforeseen direction. The counsel and advice, as well as all kinds of social assistance these people offered were often crucial when certain decisions needed to be made and carried out. Here are some examples from the interviews that make exactly this point (they speak for themselves).

> There was, eh, well, young people formed a group, mainly students who had become Christians, and we all met, usually every day, and together we read the Bible (. . .), talked. (Ansgar, p. 1, line 32–43)
>
> Well, yes. That all started because I got to know someone who was with such a school, someplace else, well, now in Africa. I found that very interesting because that was not simply a . . . well, it is six months, and I imagined that as six months with God, when you have a bit more time, really, more or less like, well, take time for God. Because it really was not my plan to go and become a missionary. In fact, not at all (laughs). And at first I thought I would stay in Germany and do something like that in Germany, because my English was bad. It's like, well, I thought I would for sure not be able to follow the lessons, but then he . . . well, it turned out quite differently then (laughs). And then I came across this address in the Philippines, quite by accident, really. It was German-English, too, the school, well at least this, this class, the instructions were German-English. (Ursula, p. 1, line 43–53)

Many interviewees spoke of similar experiences and developments. Sometimes they told stories from their earlier lives that already suggested – in hindsight – that they would later become missionaries. As the examples illustrate, the path to becoming a missionary, as it emerges from the interviews used here, is highly

[17] Here we refer to the topos of Koselleck's (2004) theory of history.

contingent. Still, without exception, this path fits very well the deeply rooted (religious) motives and intentions that all the biographies share. At least in this respect, this path very much seems like a coherent continuation of the lives our interview partners have led so far.

Caritas – Altruism under the banner of love and charity

The altruistic motives of people who often bring together their missionary work with social and development politics need not necessarily be interpreted as religious motives. Often it is simply the poverty of others that compels people to help. But in these interviews these motives are of course always associated with the interviewees' Christian orientation in life. Their own religious convictions do not allow for too large a "gap" between rich and poor. The poor deserve compensatory justice and assistance under the banner of Christian love and charity. And one's own – relative – wealth evokes feelings of shame.

> And when I came with the Liebenzeller Mission to Jekatherinburg two years ago I thought I knew how life was in Russia. But then I was really shocked when I arrived in a modern big city, and I felt I was in America or in Canada. From the airport I went to an apartment that to me was furnished with such luxury like I barely had had in Germany, for example, a stove with ceramic glass panels, Ikea-style furniture, the most beautiful, well, carpets, American washer, refrigerator, everything was there. Then I was supposed to buy furniture for my room, which was still unfurnished. The two of us lived in a three-bedroom-apartment. I was majorly confused inside. What kind of furniture should I buy, because I kept thinking from my German experiences, too, what kind of people will I invite here, and the thought crossed my mind, if I invited some poor Russian people to such a luxury apartment, what would happen then? (Susanne, p. 1, lines 42–54)

Here Susanne not only articulates the kind of trouble she has with her own "luxurious" life style, but as was the case with other interview partners, she talks several times about her wish that economic differences and discrimination could be amended. Religious belief and, in particular, the Christian commandment to help and support the poor and socially powerless are motivations which all our interview partners associate with their missionary engagement, providing an orientation for actions and in life, but also constituting a goal to which one can be true through doing missionary work, and perhaps even come close to achieving it.

To prove oneself – Stability in faith

People who wish to work as missionaries need to fulfill different requirements. One of them is having a (relatively) firm belief. Missionaries starting out are expected to remain true to their religious orientations in both their actions and their lives. As is well-known, there is no such thing as belief never haunted by doubts. Almost all believers talk about such doubts. They are, as is often said,

an integral part of religious faith. Still, one can distinguish between more and less solid beliefs. Steadfastness of faith is, among other things, the result of more experience dealing with crises of faith (and of being able to successfully weather such crises), and missionaries should have proven themselves and be ready to have their faith put on trial again. Otherwise, their mission to live and convey their religious convictions will be jeopardized from the very start. Their education, as well as the additional training and preparation that further qualifies them to become missionaries, includes components aimed at a continued deepening of an already firm belief, which is one of the *motivating wishes* of our interview partners. In part, they explicitly express this wish, in part they show it as a desire and motivation "in between the lines" of their narratives.

In the context of the missionary training of the Church, this wish is honored, for example, by the purposeful promotion of identification with the religion and the religious community through rituals and a whole range of other communal activities. It is further honored by assigning (simple, but also at times quite very challenging) tasks and the kind of responsibility that comes with such assignments. Priests and other mentors may play a crucial function as role models, not least because of the advice and assistance they provide the would-be missionaries. Due to space restrictions, we will not be offering any interview excerpts that prove this point. However, later we will return to the fact of how central the own (religious) self and the strengthening of this self is to missionary practice.

Secular desires and hedonistic proclivities

The following aspect, too, is remarkable, but is also, of course, quite obvious: the roads that lead people to religious faith, and in particular to missionary work, not only guide them across the broad field of religious experiences and orientations. Whoever sets out to bring the Christian gospel to people living in far-away and strange countries, often has very secular interests as well, though it is not always clear that these interests will actually be satisfied. But if he or she finds opportunities, they fully enjoy them. People who are not "tuned in" to religion may have the same desires and wishes and may also try to have them met: the promise of excitement, adventure, a change of scenery, of fun and enjoyment. Side by side with deeper, morally or ethically motivated goals or spiritual aspirations, other aspects of life, are attracting people to missionary work.

> I had this address, then a friend somehow had seen a picture of the place. I mean, it sounds a bit crazy, but she somehow described the ocean and white ships she had seen on the picture (laughs). And anyway, this was the moment when I knew that it's not Germany, and I (laughs), well I always wanted to go and see other places. It just never had turned out that way. I never came further than Vienna, never beyond Austria, and back then I really thought I did not want to travel farther. I wanted to finish school, but then, well, then all the signs said Philippines. Somehow I was . . . well, I watched a movie on TV. It was about the Philippines, and I, no matter what the

> newspapers said, well, I knew, this place and no other, something like that. And then I applied and got everything ready. (Ursula, p. 1–2, lines 54–64)

Our interview partners do not directly explain what they individually associate with the kinds of myths and phantasms hinted at in the above quote. But we do not need to know which subjective, individually connoted meanings "the ocean and white ships," "the Philippines," or simply "other places" may possess for the interviewee herself. It is clear that collective myths and individual phantasms, which are often only vaguely articulated and are sometimes pretty secular and "hedonistic" desires and longings (cp. Boesch, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2005; Lonner & Hayes, 2007), form an integral part of people's motivations for leaving their homes to become missionaries. Foreign places seem attractive even though it may not be all that clear what exactly is attractive about them and what motivates people to leave Germany (temporarily), for example, and set out for a mission on the other side of the planet. Later we will look at more examples from the analyzed interviews, discussing such "pleasure gains" in the course of describing why our interview partners not only set out for many promising lands faraway, but also why they remained there for long periods of time.

The time in the field – Reasons to stay

"Staying abroad" – Broadening occupational perspectives

Interviewees did not always plan to stay abroad for an extended period. The decision to work as a missionary in far-away countries and remain there for a much longer period than initially intended was often made when the interview partners were already in the "field," an experience that made old plans seem irrelevant. For Ursula, the participation in a Disciples of Christ School turned into a several-year-long stay in an increasingly familiar, foreign country that she enjoyed more and more. The unplanned extension included intensified occupational training that opened up job opportunities that Ursula had not considered before nor been aware were only available to her as a Christian:

> I was finished with almost all my courses prior to the diploma thesis. The rest I am doing now (laughs). And, yes, I left the university four years ago in October, well, yes, almost four years ago, and I got there with the intention to stay half a year, to take part in the School and then go back home again and do my work experience internship for the university. Well, I got a diploma in social work, I thought, I'd just see about jobs. Well, I really thought I'd stay in Germany and well, the missionary work thing was already a bit in the air, but I really expected more to return to Germany, and go in Germany, well, here, somewhere in Berlin or so, I'd go into a missionary social work project or something similar. Something like that. That was what I was expecting, anyway. Yes, then I got there, and after a very short time I really liked it very much, and relatively soon I could see myself staying longer. But I didn't decide right away, and then at the end of the School we really had to decide more or less

> where to go from there. And there at the School they have this offer about cacao where one could, well continue with, that is, do a three-year leadership training, and, yes, it was like this, well, I wanted to do that, well, I could very well imagine that I'd stay but I was always afraid God would say I should go back to Germany (laughs). And then I finally came to the point where I knew it was okay if I went back. I had made arrangements for the work experience internship so I could do that later, and then I was, well, at this point I already had the feeling that this could be something longer, that is, that I probably could very well live abroad for a longer period of time. And this leadership training I really did with the goal in mind, that it would not matter whether I will be in Germany or abroad, that is simply something like, well, a kind of preparation, if one day I will really live and work someplace else, as a Christian or a missionary (laughs). (Ursula, p. 2–7, lines 65–90)

Strings of the heart – Love for country and people, fun and "pleasure gain"

Quite apart from occupational opportunities or the chance to learn about missionary life in close contact with people who share one's beliefs, there were also other reasons to stay. Our interview partners talk about their basic religious ambitions, motives, and intentions but also of the secular things to which they soon became attached. They all describe their nascent love for the foreign country and its people, a love that in time grew into attachments that brought a new dimension to the occupational and religious motives and interests and complemented them. Schooling and additional occupational training turned into prolonged stays that were considered by the interviewees as gifts enriching their lives in a multitude of ways. Let's start with the affection for others, the kind of satisfaction to be found in social relationships and other bonds, as well as a fully secular hedonism, which each one of our interview partners experienced.

> What I think now? Well, I think how much fun I had being there, that I really loved to be there. All in all, I stayed for three and a half years, I came back in May because of my internship, but I plan to go down there again next year and then I want to stay longer. About the Philippines, well, it's like this, that from the very beginning I did not exactly feel like I was called to go to the Philippines or something like that. I really went there because of the school (additional training, J.S./ M.A.), but I have to say, somehow during that time I learned to love the country and the people and everything there very much, and being here (in Germany, J.S./ M.A.) now, I realize that sometimes, well that it simply, that it really has become a part of my heart which hadn't been there before, when I read something or an email or something, aaah (laughs). That's when I notice that somehow it really has taken a deep, deep hold or so. (Ursula, p. 2, lines 95–106)
>
> I really liked, too . . . well, we did a lot with the teenagers. Like, there was this one trip when we took them somehow, when we went out with the boats. Well, sometimes really exciting things happened (. . .) we here with those boats, with those little boats, and somehow we went out across the ocean in them (laughs) and somehow, well, we really had some adventures with them (laugh), there in some kind of boat, and then, in the middle of nowhere on the water (laughs) the engine stops. (Ursula, p. 13–14, lines 701–709)

Ansgar, too, reports how some things "were burned into our hearts" (Ansgar, p. 2, line 100). And Susanne (p. 16) tells us:

> Well, I am not somebody who thinks negatively of Russia. From the distance it looks even more positive (. . .) Back then I came to Russia with a certain enthusiasm for this country because I simply have been on fire for this country, and the Russians feel that enthusiasm even when my attitude became a bit more realistic. (Susanne, pp. 16–17, line 580–629)

Numerous examples could be cited to illustrate the joy experienced abroad, the pleasure in being alive, the gratification, the satisfaction. But instead, we will later turn to those experiences in particular which our interview partners explicitly designated as *positive alternative visions* that made life in "Germany" look somewhat pale and bleak as well as superficial and meaningless. Many of our following points demonstrate very impressively how our interview partners turned away from "Germany," or rather from a cultural life form they had in some respects begun to experience as "impoverished," and which today they still criticize.

Experiences of difference I: Life without a worlds of consumptions – Positive alternative visions for materialistic societies of affluence and individualistic "fake worlds of glamour"

Again and again a topos appears in the narratives that will sound familiar to the "postmaterialistically" minded:[18] they reject an existence depleted of meaning under the conditions of rampant capitalism and consumerism. The figure of the lone individual who cares for nothing but shopping, owning, and consuming is considered highly unattractive. An alternative is provided not only by religious orientations, offering a meaningful existence, but also simply through life in regions less saturated by wealth. This can be seen especially in those parts of the narratives where the narrators talk about their perceptions of the big cities in Russia. They report almost shocking experiences because in Russia they encountered what they had known at home and had wished to escape. Thus Ansgar, much like Susanne and Ursula, describes how he had a hard time getting used to "the dirt in the streets," "the filthy chairs in restaurants (. . .) or in hotel rooms, (. . .) they sometimes really had a greasy shine, or to the vermin running around the room." But then he continues like this:

> And then it always was quite the interesting experience, for example, which had already started in Moscow because that city is on a whole different level, or then back again in Germany, to arrive in Berlin or in Frankfurt and to see all that. Of course on the one side I was grateful for many things, but other things I found repulsive, well, basically this consumerism and so on. It is, well, in Moscow it has

[18] For an empirical diagnosis and discussions concerning the theoretical concept of "postmaterialism," see, e.g., Inglehart (1977), Zitterbarth (1987). See also Straub, Zielke & Werbik, 2005.

> become strong, too, sometimes even stronger than with us, but that, that, this, to have this discrepancy, that the people living in the provinces are so poor and then, and then here, they build this fake world of glamour. (Ansgar, p. 5, lines 256–262)

Consumerism in a fake world of glamour is rejected. It is fitting that the inevitable dispensing with wealth and luxury on missionary tours is experienced as an enrichment of life that brings "joy" and "fun." Even unpleasant things such as unsanitary living conditions are put up with. Our interview partners left the countries they stayed at with an abiding positive impression, and this was owing to the inhabitants themselves, their colorful, lively existence, and foreign appearance.

> That in any case is something which I have often experienced, that I really had fun doing this, that I also like it, to sit in one of those huts sometimes, and in this moment really there is nothing I find disgusting, nothing which I find anything but that I rather like being there (laughs), well, so this was, it was really different, and what I now recall, well, there simply is a lot of joy, I have to say, to just to get to know these people, to get to know a little bit of that culture which is very colorful, too, very lively and very, they are even more, well, perhaps it's just this gypsyness, you know? I just had a whole lot of fun being among these people or, or being a part of them, too, the way they looked sometimes. (Ursula, p. 13, lines 689–698)

Even under conditions of severe privations and exacting demands, the joy and fun by no means disappear. Thus, Ursula talked about an assignment in a community where the houses were built on posts, without running water, toilets, or a sewage system. And not only did the sanitary conditions leave much to be desired, but child mortality rates were at 50% – almost every day a newborn or a baby died. Illiteracy is the norm, medical care is inadequate, leprosy and other diseases are wide spread. Still, the narrator closes this passage with these words: "Well, this was an assignment which I really liked very much" (Ursula, p. 15, lines 802–803).

For some time Ursula herself lived in poverty, had almost no money and was dependent on other people for food (Ursula, p. 16). But this, too, was not deplored, but rather considered an opportunity and an enriching experience. What Ursula misses the most when she is here (in Germany) now, where she has "my room alone," as she puts it (Ursula, p. 3, lines 124), is the communal life.

Experiences of difference II: Life without stress – Positive alternative visions to time pressures and achievement orientation at home

Different variations of the interpretational pattern summarized in the sub-heading for this section also often appear in our interview partners' narratives. All of them identify a life-style in the "foreign culture" that they find attractive. Ursula gives a simple example, dealing with certain elements of (stereotypically represented) habitus, when she says about the Filipinos:

> Well somehow, there is for example this difference where you, where the Filipinos are actually much more relaxed and it's real easy to learn that from them. (Ursula, p. 3, lines 156–157)

Ursula is not inclined to idealize since she also talks about the drawbacks of the relaxed life-style just mentioned. Yet she sees it as a challenge for her own self, an opportunity and a chance *to learn*, to have experiences, which for different reasons (strict time regulations, achievement and efficiency orientation), are hard to come by in "Germany," where they are rather the exception. But we will refrain here from presenting comparable, common knowledge examples and giving more detailed interpretations.

Experiences of difference III: Sociableness and hospitality – Positive alternative visions to the isolated seclusion of private spheres

All of our interview partners described and reflected upon another experienced cultural difference (which, again, we will only briefly elaborate on):

> I always found it really nice that the people there live very openly and are incredibly welcoming and cheerful, really not so typically Asian but very loud, they like to sing and laugh, they like to dance, and somehow, and there it often happened to me that I was invited by complete strangers into their home or someone talked to me on the street or at the market or something like this. When I go to the market, then I can't help but attract attention and then they immediately ask my name, where I come from, if I'm married. (Ursula, p. 4, lines 194–200)
>
> It (the missionary work, J.S. / M.A.) brings you into many homes, and many people invite you, and then something always comes up somehow (. . .), which is great, too. (. . .) Here you wouldn't, not if you did not know the people, if you stood before their door, they would not let you in, not just so (laughs), but that is also different there, the whole attitude. (Ursula, p. 4, lines 208–213)

The interviewees agreed that on the whole the doors are simply open wider. It was easier to meet other people spontaneously, to be open and find time for others. Generally, they all experienced what it means to be welcome. They did not have to meet specific requirements or prove who they were and what they wanted (Ursula, p. 8). Encounters often occurred under the banner of hospitality and which our interview partners delighted in and experienced as a generous gift and enrichment, becaming a reason for them to stay or return.

Experiences of difference IV: Authentic emotions and powerful religiosity – Positive alternative visions to a rationalistic culture

Some of the very important autobiographical events described in the narratives are those that deal with spiritual experiences and religious feelings, with emotions in general, and with their public expression.

> Well, that's something else which I experienced there, that we Germans are so often bothered by our minds (laughs), or let's put it this way, that many there struggle with their minds. (Ursula, pp. 17–18, lines 915–920)
>
> Well, for us it really was the most beautiful thing when, when the people who came (. . .), well, there were always some who came to believe, when we were there,

> too. They opened their life to Jesus and had truly strong experiences with God. Well, we often said there, wow, this is really powerful, much stronger than for many of us, and they had, well, these young people still had a fire and they said we want to, now, yes, to continue with it, to build something. (Ansgar, p. 1, lines 54–58)

Our interview partners appreciated not just the enterprising spirit of the young converts, but as they emphasize, they outright admired how free from all fear the young people's dealings with spiritual and religious experiences were. The interviewees attested to the presence in the "others" of a sense of ease and openness in emotional matters that had long been lost in their own reductive, rationalistic culture.

Cultural difference, intercultural communication and competence

Everyday cooperation and coexistence beyond cultural boundaries

All the interview partners talked about their experiences of cultural difference, of alterity and a sense of being alien (e.g., Susanne, p. 3, 16), but above all they talked about how they learned to understand and in part overcome their initial feelings of distance and strangeness. In the foreign country, they all had to live with the native inhabitants, to listen to their language and learn it, at least bits and pieces of it. Thus, paradoxically, they were forced to do what they wanted to do. Different from other groups living abroad because of their jobs, there was no possibility of retreat for our interview partners. They of course lived in teams in which they co-operated mostly with people "like themselves." But remaining only among one's own, or worse, living in "ghettoes" of privileged expatriates from the same country of origin, conflicts with the basic missionary calling. Thus, they were all expected to get along with everyone in the "in-group" of mostly international Christians. Furthermore, they were expected to become involved with possible converts, to talk to them, and to initiate social and cultural interactions. Usually this kind of community life extended over periods of months or even years, with people leaving and others joining the group. (This often meant living together in the same building and also traveling together; during missionary assignments, close contact with the inhabitants is welcome and the rule, the missionaries are part of the communities, they spend the night in the homes of local hosts, etc.; Ursula, p. 3 bottom). Also, locals are usually integrated into the school and work teams as co-worker or closely co-operating partners. In this respect, too, e.g., Ursula considers her experiences as positive (Ursula, p. 3, lines 132–133). Like the others, she never idealizes the sometimes difficult intercultural practice, clearly emphasizing communication problems and other obstacles to friendship and association.

Differences that remain, necessary arguments

Almost inevitably conflicts will come up in such a close-knit communal life. They necessarily push problems to the surface, which in turn may initiate learning

processes. Under different circumstances these learning processes could be easily avoided, the usual strategy to (not) deal with unresolved problems (cp. Weidemann, 2005, 2007). The difficulties and problems thematized in the narratives range from well-known language and communication difficulties (Susanne, p. 2, lines 70–91, p. 3, lines 110–117; Ursula, p. 5) to psychological injuries that hurt people so deeply that it calls the very self into question. That the language of the alien other can function as a means of severe discrimination and social exclusion, rather than as a means of communication, of negotiation, and co-ordination of action etc., can be vividly seen in a passage from Ursula's narrative. For her, the *exclusionary* power of a foreign language was the most negative experience of her stay abroad. At the time of the interview, this experience was still painfully felt, and she continued to be highly sensitized to being excluded because of language. In similar situations, for example at the Caritas in Germany, where Ursula was working at the time of the interview, she reacted strongly to similar experiences. At the Caritas, she was meeting people who spoke Russian, another language she does not understand, and this served to exclude and segregate her (Ursula, p. 5). The key situation she experienced in the Philippines, where she often heard "remarks which really were against white people or against certain things" (Ursula, p. 5), was thus reactivated

> Well, I just remember one negative recollection, maybe because that's still a little bit (laughs), well, I still haven't worked that all through (laugh), but it is, I don't know whether this, whether I got used to it, or maybe I just feel like that sometimes. I am, well, obviously I am no Filipina (laughs) and I never will be. For starters, I don't look like one (laughs), that is, I am always different when I go there. And what I, I didn't, it is really too bad, I have to admit, but I still cannot speak the language very well because I really always worked within this international context. And because I did not think I would stay there, in the beginning, and then I started speaking more, and there we often speak English, well, really, our language is English, and I always, well, I never thought now I am going to stay in the Philipinnes for a really long time, and somehow it probably was already my second language, that's why I didn't learn it but I intend to when I go again. First thing I do (laughs). But, yes, and there, there I sometimes got, well, that's where I had the most difficulties, also with the different cultures, but really with the language sometimes. Not among us co-workers because there it's like, everyone knows English and everybody, that is really our common language. It can be a bit like this, when a lot of Filipinos are together, then they very soon like to talk in their own language and then you feel a bit like you are left out, and I have to say, this is much stronger with the Filipinos than with the Germans, you know? Or the others who were there, maybe it's because they were in their own country, I don't know. Of course I know that there's such a tendency in other countries as well. This being among themselves, that is something that really has to do with history, well, this, this is not only a matter of language, you know? That was something which often bothered me a bit, and there I noticed, too, there simply is, there just is, or, well, that it hurt me, perhaps this feeling of being excluded sometimes, and also sometimes the feeling that they really do not want to speak in another language right now, or maybe not at all, they want to speak among themselves. But

> I really have to say, there are also other reasons. Not personal reasons, but that just has to do with cultural, historical reasons, you name it. Well, I do understand that. But right then, when it happens, it still makes you feel pretty bad. (Ursula, p. 5, lines 236–264)

In another interesting example from Ursula, which fits very well with the above narrative passage, the focus again is not on personal animosities or interpersonal differences:

> But of course there were always things coming up that were hurtful or that people like me found problematic. For example, down there are such, they have certain preconceptions of white people, which are shaped predominantly by Americans, and they also have certain historical backgrounds and so on, or the entire history that this country really was always occupied and most people were living as servants or in other oppressed positions, and there is just so much frustration with regard to white people or something like that. But often that does not come out directly, but sometimes more from the back, or they vent their frustration at you even though it's not your fault, or such things. But then again they really almost worship white people because they really believe that they are somehow less because they have been oppressed all the time. And when they think they are better and still worship white people, that you notice, too. And then again there is such a frustration, and when I, for example, when I just go down the street, then people look at me, well, it can happen that people really stare at me or stop or whisper something among themselves. Well, it depends, too, where you are, but you always stick out there. (Ursula, p. 4, lines 174–189)

Obviously, Ursula is talking here about perceptions of self and other that are rooted in the country's history of colonization. The own self is stigmatized by the native population because that self belongs to the group labeled "white people." White people are all seen as former colonialists and placed within a historical tradition still associated with relationships of power and domination. Sometimes this is articulated quite openly and explicitly, but more often it is expressed subliminally. Oppression and inequality have been ongoing painful experiences for the inhabitants.

And from the perspective of our interview partners, this may be seen or felt as either burden or flattery. The local inhabitants "reflect back" their experience of difference onto our interview partners, alternating between aloofness and attraction, aversion and respect, reserve and curiosity, rejection and admiration (Ursula, p. 7). That and the ways in which Christian religions and their missionaries have been implicated in colonization, and that *today* continue to be experienced as culturally dominant, remains an unresolved issue in the narratives. Nonetheless, the historical baggage of colonial rule and oppression are constantly present in relationships of today. Our interview partners are very sensitive to this "heritage" and *struggle with* how it is passed on from one generation to the next, changing but never vanishing. They soon find themselves in a situation that is as emotionally complex as it is precarious. As Ursula demonstrates so keenly in her narrative, the partners feel stigmatized as white people

and *personally hurt* by the formerly colonized, alien others. What is experienced as offensive behavior, however, is immediately put into a broader context. Ursula *feels* hurt and knows at the same time that what to her seem to be hurtful actions of others are "not meant personally," but need to be understand as a result of a shared history and its violent imbalance of power. Colonization, domination, oppression, and an inequality still manifest today determine the interaction and communication between local inhabitants and the white people. This situation is even more complicated by the fact that people like Ursula are working as missionaries. In the service of their God, they wish to turn the alien others into Christians, that is, they want to change them in the name of the Christian God. Because of the inherent claim of superiority, all such enterprises are in danger of reproducing colonial structures of the past that supposedly were overcome long ago. Try as they might, our interview partners, who criticize and reject these colonial structures, are still implicated in them through their missionary actions.

For this and other reasons, Ursula's religious engagement is structured in a highly complex way. As can be seen most notedly in her narrative, Ursula's missionary work is at times accompanied by feelings of guilt that have their origin in the former European colonization of other continents. Transgenerational transferences are responsible that our interviewee's self, and in particular her religious self, experiences feelings of guilt. And even more importantly, that self realizes that it is responsible for making restitution[19] for the incurred injustice. At one point in her narrative (p.18), Ursula says that she "as a white person or German" could give something to the Filipinos and Filipinas, too, not least because she can ask "people's forgiveness" for the violence and oppression they have suffered. She then talks about her efforts "to metaphorically kneel before them" (p. 18) and thus contribute to the healing of spiritual wounds: "It probably was not a complete healing for everything, but still, still I noticed that people were touched, or that something just changed" (p. 18). Ursula and her colleagues, through their missionary actions, sometimes strive for restitution by showing deference towards the alien others by assisting them and trying to learn from them instead of employing past generations' dominant and oppressive behavior. They make these efforts within interactive relationships that are, however, by no means equal or egalitarian (as described above), but which in the perfect world imagined by the Protestants we interviewed, are supposed to be so. This is the ideal to which they adhere, and it may also become the ideal against which they fail. This in turn is related to a way of thinking that for logical and psychological reasons needs to "vindicate" each missionary action. But before we take a close look at this way of thinking, let's return for a moment to the striving for respect and appreciation that has left such deep traces in the narratives of our interview partners.

[19] For usage of the term "restitution," cp. Hühn (2004).

Adjustment, combined arrangements, and "third spaces"

Ursula and Susanne report in detail about their own adjustment and accommodation to the Philippine way of life and the inhabitants' local attitudes. They are considerate of local habits (e.g., in matters of clothing or certain behavior, in Ursula's case regarding the consumption of alcohol). They learn from the inhabitants and adopt certain attitudes and behaviors. For Ursula, this experience enriches her life beyond the length of her stay abroad: "To see differently, on the one hand, and then also to, to learn something else" (Ursula, p. 3, lines 148–149). The experience broadens the own horizon and allows for a certain distance from one's own life form.

> And this, that is something which I noted, too, that this, that this, perhaps it builds connections, sometimes (. . .) also, if you really want to get to know something, to treat the other (. . .) with a certain respect, sometimes you manage that, well, and sometimes not (laughs), I think that is because, well, I think that everyone is a bit arrogant sometimes and thinks, his or hers is really better, that goes for opinions, too, you know. But, but really I have to say that I really got much out of it, doing things the way it is done there or to just learn bit from them or take over some things. For of course you still remain yourself, but it is really more of a plus, well, so I think that even if I came back to Germany, for a longer period of time, it would help me here, because, well, because perhaps I got another perspective on what is considered normal here, or because I have seen something else and got know other things. (Ursula, p. 7, lines 337–349)

In other passages, too, she talks about her wish to adjust herself to the Philippine way of life. Adjustment implies respect and, in a sense, subordination, but not the – futile in any case – attempt to assimilate in all regards and without exceptions. The same is true for Susanne who summarizes:

> They always say, adjust to the culture, be a Jew among Jews, a Greek in Greece, a Russian in Russia, that's what this would mean. And our field leader was the first person in my life who told me: Susanne, you have to keep your identity, stay Susanne in Russia. Look at the culture and see where you maybe want to adjust yourself, but don't do everything like the locals. And he became my role model. In Russia, people usually don't shake hands when they meet, and if they do, then only the men. But usually a man never shakes hands with a woman. And he is doing that, always after the service he says goodbye to the people and shakes their hand. It is against all cultural norms, but he is doing it to show the people love, God's love. He shakes hands with the women, and everyone responds positively to it. (Susanne, p. 12, lines 427–433)

Still, a certain consideration and respectful adaptation is necessary. All in all, Ursula associates her successful efforts to adjust with the feeling of being *accepted as other*:

> Often and more and more I felt that, that the people, on the other hand, accepted me very strongly, well, so that I didn't, that I just never had the feeling of rejection because I came from another country. Well it's, sometimes in certain situations it's there, but

> I also have to say, if you, what I more often experienced, I really tried to adjust somewhat and I really liked to do that, well, as much as possible, for well, I think, there's always things which you just simply can't do. I can't, I will always look different there. Or similar things, but then I really had incredible fun to give myself over to that, this, you know, and I have to say, it's exactly this what, what I think the Filipinos really admire very much, when you, when you really don't just stick to your position and, well, now, I am from there, and there I do that so-and-so, you know, but when you accept how they do it. I don't know for sure if I can always do it, but that's a bit my goal, to resign myself and not, and, and really to respect how, well, how things are done there. (Ursula, p. 6, lines 288–302)

Describing the cultural exchange and the intercultural learning processes she experienced, Ursula draws a typical conclusion. Neither the (initially) foreign and alien culture nor the (formerly familiar, now more distanced) own culture are idealized or unreservedly appreciated. All our interview partners either called for a *combined way of life* that integrates elements of both cultures, mitigating extremes here and there (which means that the chosen elements were not simply added up and put together unaltered). Or they design a *third space* in between both cultures, one that emerges from the imaginative and creative narrative practice and that constitutes something *new*, which should not be misunderstood as being just another combined arrangement of already existing elements. The words of our interview partners are reminicent of theoretical concepts that focus on e.g., the "creolization" of languages or the "hybridization" of cultural ways of life and identities.[20] From Ursula's narratives, here is one example of the first type:

> Well, I adjusted very much to this, but then again I realized that parts of the German are good, too, well, that it, that one needs to find a balance. Well, I've had the impression all along, anyway, that both these cultures, that they really fit very well: Philippine and German. Because, well, because we can, can learn from them and the other way round, well, we each got the extreme, and the balance is just, would be the best. To, hmm, the Filipinos often live a bit from one moment to the next and ha-, hmm, they are relatively aimless, while Germans on the other hand are very goal-oriented. They sometimes forget everything else that is around them, and the Filipinos forget everything else and never make one step (laughs). And if one can't find a bit of a balance of the two, well, then this could be a really good mixture, you know, and, yes, I don't know, but it depends, I think, we really learned quite a bit from each other, but I think, it always depends upon how much you really want it, you know, and, but I – yes, there are a lot of things which I really like very much. (Ursula, p. 3–4, lines 162–174)

Persuasive communication and violence – Mission as helping people to help themselves or patronizing conversion

Central to missionary work is its religious character, yet this never dominates the narratives of our interview partners. They also see the very secular aspects

[20] Cp. for example, Bhabha (1990, 1994, 1997); also Ackermann (2003).

of their religiously motivated engagement, and sometimes the goal of conversion is put aside. Their work, our interview partners told us, means serving others and assisting them in the achievement of their own goals and interests. In general, our interview partners claim to have respect for the foreign others, to be interested in them and to meet them with esteem and appreciation, which, our interview partners say, is felt and noticed by the others. Thus Ursula reports about several youths:

> Well (. . .), I think for them (. . .) this was a bit of a novelty that someone really just lives with them, well, shares their life, because that, well, I don't think that happens very often (. . .). Well, they felt really honored or, or also kind of respected because, because usually nobody does that (. . .). I think for them it somehow was some kind of appreciation, too, you know. (Ursula, p. 14, lines 713–721)

The narratives repeatedly emphasized that other cultures and their members "really (have) something to give which you cannot get from a German" (Ursula, p. 17). This sentiment, too, our interview partners say, was expressed to the local inhabitants, along with numerous demonstrations of respect and admiration. And yet, the matter of respect, esteem, and appreciation is not so simple. The seemingly selfless "service to others" is in effect *not* a mere end in itself. It is always bound up with our interview partners' interest in proselytizing their belief. Ultimately, the missionaries interfere more than just marginally in the lives of the alien others, consciously and purposely determined to change their ways of life. That the tendencies of, on the one hand, "selfless service to others" and, on the other hand, "patronizing conversion efforts" are felt as contradictory and antagonistic, can be seen in the following passage from Ursula's narrative:

> For myself I find it important that when I go back now, well, when I can manage it (laughs), then I rather want to be in a supporting position and not necessarily the one who needs to do everything, well, this, I rather would be in a lesser place and I rather would stand behind the Filipinos and not in front of them, you know, and rather that they are released. I don't want to go there and do something on my own or something like this, I don't know for sure. (Ursula, p. 7–8, lines 376–382)

The often-declared consideration for the alien others, their ways of life, values and norms, traditions, and habits is not thematized for moral reasons alone. It also serves a superior strategical interest. This implicated the entire matter, and all communication and interaction between missionaries and local inhabitants is potentially fraught with suspicion and ambivalence. The (allegedly) selfless service to the alien others could be revealed as being mostly work for one's own cause. The well-meant address and advice given to the free or "released" alien others may just be persuasive talk for the purpose of a "conversion to one's own" religious belief (i.e., to a belief full of cultural-specific presuppositions, implications, and consequences). The declared aim of all missionary action – a kind

of practical nostrification through conversion – is not easily compatible with the well-meant intention to accept the alien others as they are and to give them, at most, maeutic assistance when realizing their own aims.

Struggles for acceptance, dominance, and enforcement of one's own culture

As we have seen, differences between missionaries and the local inhabitants remain despite the continuing cultural exchange and the mutual rapprochement. Several times these autobiographical narratives mention that any attempts to cover up or to simply ignore differences would be futile and inexpedient. They have to be noted, not least because our interview partners do not accept all cultural differences *unconditionally*, as if it did not matter how one thinks, feels, acts, and lives, and whether one believes in this or that or some other God! Our interview partners *judge* the foreign culture, i.e., foreign cultural life forms, language games and action modes, according to what seems important to them. Their judgment is based in part on the fundamental, indisputable Christian values to which they adhere. Ultimately, these values are the valid measuring stick for judging the alien other. Incidentally, not only do our interview partners at times attest to a certain superiority in their own culture concerning questions of belief and religious conduct, but also in the organization of secular, everyday life. This concerns, for example, the differences between direct and indirect communication, a problematic often addressed in comparative studies of cultures.

> On the other hand, there again are certain things, where I think that we as Christians live together, and some things are wrong, too, in (other) cultures, and then you do not have to respect all of that in every last detail, you know. Well, I mean, for example, for us it's more like that we are very upfront and say things very clearly which can be very, very hurtful for a Filipino, and that's something they are not used to at all, but there I realize, here we can learn from each other, where perhaps as a German you need to be more careful and perhaps you have to say that somewhat more subtle and not so whosh, somehow, but on the other hand, the Filipinos can learn, too, that it's better to talk directly about things, and not now somehow through a third person or what not, such things, you know. But this is again in another context, well, we live international, and we demand more of ourselves than now, if I"d go in some community, you know. (Ursula, p. 6, lines 302–313)

Certainly one can and should learn from each other. But at the same time, it is unequivocally clear that for our interview partners acting as missionaries, the final, "essential" goal is not intercultural exchange: it is mission and the Christian Protestant belief in the "one God". This is the heart of life at the mission station, this is what it's ultimately all about. The schooling or vocational training abroad, including the integrated missionary assignments, follows an institutionalized curriculum and leads up to a higher goal. The life stories recapitulate this schematic pattern, down to very detailed records of single components,

(e.g., a typical day in the Disciples of Christ School; Ursula, p. 8), and they never lose sight of the final goal. Youth With A Mission (YWAM), as well as older missionaries live "with God" and in His service, during the quiet hours of prayer, during communal worship, when engaged in everyday activities or talking to a mentor, as part of controversial discussions and public events, or in the moving hours-long overland trips while on missionary assignments, in short: ideally always and everywhere. Receiving and spreading the word of God is the center of everyday life. His word is supposed to be heard, and possibly in a most consequential manner. This is one of the primary reasons for meeting other people and maintaining contacts – as much as one might enjoy these contacts without always having the over-all goal in mind (Ursula, p. 11). Ursula cares very much about turning contacts into enduring and sustained friendships. She describes many activities that allow for the establishment and strengthening of such bonds. Among them were: "to clean the village," "collect garbage," "mow the lawn" and other activities of which the local inhabitants "did not know really why, now why we did that". Organizing "events" in public spaces (e.g., schools, sport fields) was also part of these activities, and during these events films were shown: "Well, we showed Jesus films, but then we organized something, something like a small Disciples of Christ School, too, where we held lectures about certain issues, but with prayer, too, and such things and we did such things. But we did this only when we knew the people, and they really liked it a lot and that is, somehow things just developed on many levels or, or people connected with each other, or we became involved in different things" (Ursula, p. 12).

These last interview excerpts demonstrate that contact with other people follows a calculated strategic plan. The religious motives initially stay in the background, at least most of the time, and the local inhabitants are not even really sure why these people collect the garbage in the village or mow the lawn to then invite them to come to "Woman's Hour," "Youth Circles," religious services for children, Bible lectures, or prayer hours. Ursula lists a whole row of examples that can also be found in other interviews. Susanne (p. 24), for example, describes an organized discussion group for Russians interested in the German language, and that is conceived of as a pleasant "cappuccino for the soul":

> Well, that is not yet a real Church event but it could turn into one. Well, now it's something like this, where you establish relationships and contracts and bring in a little bit of what the Christian belief says about an issue, but you don't say "you have to read the Bible" and it does not have the form of a service, but people are together in a relaxed atmosphere and talk about Christian issues. Well, it is people who are simply interested in German. (Susanne, p. 24, lines 853–860)

It is important that all the described contacts and relationships always *lead to changes that affect the life and the self of the people about to be converted*. For the alien others "things just developed," which – in full accord with the goals of one's

own missionary actions – could be regarded as successes and enjoyed: "That's something I found, well, for me this is the most beautiful thing". Such success stories make the missionary assignments seem particularly rewarding, for all these assignments are about an intended conversion and the extension of *one's own* community of belief that goes with it. Our interview partners act on the assumption based on their own religious convictions that conversion will bring happiness to the (converted) others. Often they say that the Christian belief leads individuals as well as the (somewhat ailing) society as a whole along the path towards lasting redemption, improvement, and healing (after "seventy years of ungodliness," as Ursula (p. 15) says about Russia, adding that in Germany today "God is rejected" (Ursula, p. 17).

There are also stories about very difficult but successful conversions. Ursula reports on an assignment in a poor non-Filipino neighborhood where "sea gypsies" live, a group influenced by Islam that is discriminated against in the Philippines by Filipinos and Muslims alike. This assignment she describes as "tough" and depressing because of the stark poverty that could be seen everywhere. Some things she really loathed and even found disgusting (Ursula, p. 13), a reaction she needed to overcome if she did not want to destroy all hopes for success right from the beginning. Ursula, as well as her fellow missionaries, managed to do this. With "the help of God" they found a way into the hearts of these poorest of the poor, the outcasts who nobody else cared about. Before the assignment they fasted and prayed, afterwards they thanked God that he "truly gives us the heart" (Ursula, p.13) to initiate such ventures, to go through with them, and complete them with success and inner satisfaction.

We want to mention one other remarkable example. Ursula (p. 16) talks about a local priest working with youth gangs. Under his and other Christians' influence the gang members changed into "new" people who went into the streets, no longer to commit violent crimes, but to protest peacefully. Ursula describes how the youths listened to the priest's sermon, participated in a kind of worship and adoration, demonstrated their own dances in public places,

> and then they (did) another great thing, where all the leaders of the gangs stood together in front in a circle, and also for those, for those, too, they prayed together, where such great things just had happened, and I just thought *this is just so incredible* (. . .). Well, okay, the priest really did a lot with them and then this Youth With A Mission, they also organized a mini Disciples of Christ School for them, they had done that before and did it now again and during that time we were down there and participated, well, we also took part, well, we really participated a whole lot. (Ursula, p. 16, lines 835–839)

There are many similar stories to be found in the narratives, stories about people who were not originally among those who were to be converted, but nevertheless turned to the Christian belief. An example was a Japanese man who had

come to Russia to study the language. He and a group of Chinese were told that "we have a bit of a different kind of piety" (Susanne, p. 8, line 294), and once in while this "different kind" was successfully suggested to such "cases" standing at the margins of the conversion effort.

Quod erat demonstratum: Satisfaction is found primarily in the changes of the selves of the *alien others*, in *their* turn towards the own Christian God and belief. It is certainly assumed that their religion or world-view, their life form, and everyday practice is "simply different" (Susanne, p. 9, lines 306–310) and "not negative," however, one's own actions are directed purposefully and steadily towards changing them. The missionary vanishing point can be seen in Ursula's retrospective glimpse into an alternative positive vision of the history of humankind.

> That means if from the beginning of the history of the Church, well, when Jesus was no longer in the world, if every Christian in his or her life had helped one other person to also become a Christian, then in 1842 the entire population of the world would have been Christians. That is, there needs to be a question mark after that, I did not check whether it's true, but what it simply means, you do not need the masses, do something now, that they become Christians.

As shown above, the missionaries themselves of course also change, they broaden their horizons and learn this or that, and they also learn existentially important things as well (Ursula, p. 20). Still, a radical transformation of the missionary's own thoughts, feelings, wishes, and actions – as it is suggested to the converts – is not welcome, quite the contrary. Rather, what is sought is a strengthening and deepening of the missionaries' faith and religious self. They attempt to pay closer attention to "how God sees the world, and not how I see the world or how my culture sees the world or how my thinking sees the world" (Ursula, p. 17). The missionary activities abroad fulfill the function of a continued, successive stabilization of the religious self. The missionary is supposed to "really (become) more stable in his or her Christian being" (Ursula, p. 20), to prove oneself and become stronger.

> And no matter what you do afterwards and where you go, that you just stand firmer and, and you are more stable or, in terms of character, too, you know. (Ursula, p. 21, lines 1108–1110)

Missionary action as strengthening the self and a heightened sense of the self

From a psychological perspective, religious missionary actions address at least two groups. They are directed at people supposedly in need of conversion, i.e., those of no or a different belief. At the same time, the actions are auto-referential, i.e., directed at the missionaries themselves. The performance of actions can assert and stabilize (and of course weaken and endanger) one's potential for action. When missionary actions lead to the desired conversion of the other, the

ensuing strengthening of the self and the heightened sense of self are easily understood. These consequences are the result of the missionaries experiencing the effectiveness of their actions, that is, they experienced the in their view successful attempt of a – to put it in the terms of Ernst Boesch's psychology of belief – "perfection" ("Vervollkommnung") of the world. Missionaries work towards establishing "good" and warding off "evil." The missionary work of conversion serves this twofold goal.

As with almost all other actions, missionary actions, too, are performed long before they ever fulfill the above-mentioned psychological functions for the individual. Depending on the context, and particularly on the would-be converts' reactions to the missionary efforts, they may or may not ever be fulfilled. Meeting people who respond openly to one's intentions of converting them, and who are at least kindly disposed to the Christian faith and God, can in itself be experienced as an assertion of the self. We have already suggested that questions of doubt, hostility, and rejection, which Christian believers may often encounter, for example in "secularized" and "rationalist" Germany, are avoided in missionary encounters.

The self thus enters into a more harmonious relationship with its social environment.[21] Such a "balance of self and environment" is usually aspired to and experienced as a state of happiness (Boesch, 2005). This is exactly the case, for example, when missionary encounters become a kind of "protective cloak" distancing its bearer from the pointed questions and threatening attacks of brainy people – real and imagined – from rationalist cultures (as well as from the need for rationality and reality that haunts one's faith). In these narratives, missionary action sometimes appears to be a bulwark against the ever-threatening doubts of faith from which one can never fully escape.

Fulfilling one's missionary calling, thus, is not simply a blessing because of the visible, "outer" success of conversion. Neither does it only optimize one's potential for action in the sense that one acquires new skills and abilities (e.g., language skills and knowledge of other countries). And neither is it merely a demonstration of the power (of action) of self over the other. Successful missionary action, in fact, is rather a "victory" over oneself, over the own Self and its doubts of self and faith. The desire to shape a member of a foreign culture in the idealized image of one's own culture – even more specifically, of one's own belief -, goes hand in hand with the desire to correspond to this image oneself and be true to it. The fulfillment of *this* wish depends on a well-meaning, accommodating other. One's belief and the religious self need this accommodating other as much, it seems, as the other's conversion may be dependent on the action of the missionary.

[21] For more about this "equilibrium of the soul," cp. the original works of Ernst Bosch, whose theories we follow here, the notes by Straub (2005b) and Straub & Weidemann (2007).

In their autobiographical narratives the potential converts are revealed as "messengers" of a God-willed openness, spontaneity, emotionality, and cordialness that opens the gates to true belief and a whole-hearted trust in God and Jesus. Time and again, the others prove to be resources, providing important social assistance *for the missionaries*! They – and not just the like-minded teachers, mentors, and fellow missionaries – take on a protective and supporting function for an ever threatened self. Willing or unwilling, they contribute to the fact that the missionaries' selves draw closer to the "equilibrium of self and environment," which they will never fully reach but will always desire. Many of those momentary rapprochements can be found in the missionary practice as it is envisioned in the autobiographical narratives. The mission, and all actions that are subsumed under its higher purpose, contribute – paradoxically phrased – to the rapprochement of an unreachable goal. Missionary action, thus, finds its purpose not only in the potential convert, the object of proselytizing efforts, or in the purposeful act of conversion itself. Rather, the function of missionary action is the strengthening of the missionary's self and the heightening of his or her sense of self by creating an equilibrium between inside and outside – a temporary balance, but one that, from a psychological perspective, is of lasting importance. Herein lies one highly important meaning of missionary action, a meaning that motivates people to bring their faith and God even to remote countries.

Incidentally, the accommodating others can fulfill their described function even more effectively when they – all possible ambivalence notwithstanding – meet the missionaries with respect, with esteem as well as admiration. Suffice it to mention briefly that this aspect, too, is often addressed in the narratives. All our interview partners enjoyed the local inhabitants' respect and an elevated, "exotic" position that may provide narcissistic satisfaction (but also raise suspicions). Even so, in concluding our paper, we will focus on another aspect.

Religious believers – Inclined to tolerance and intercultural competence?

The self narrated by our interview partners *lives within its religious faith and acts as a missionary in the context of cultural exchange*. We hope to have shown why missionary action is an important subject for a psychology of religion. It should have become evident, too, why this subject is important for the psychology not only of *religion*. How can one's own convictions – and, more particularly, one's religious convictions and entire systems of belief – be recommended for acceptance and presented in such a way that they are attractive to others, and should they be so presented? And can such an attempt ever be viewed as "legitimate" and executed in a responsible manner? These questions lead right to the pulsating core of modern societies in a globalized and localized world.

The diversity of heterogeneous images of the world and humankind, of life forms, language games, orientations, and practices has long become an eminent

challenge to practical reason. But this is not only a question of ethics and morality, of law and politics, which we have to discuss and eventually solve in order to survive, at least tolerably well, the risky adventure of our shared life on this planet. Peaceful co-operation and co-existence of "unequals" requires a multitude of psychosocial and socio-cultural skills. A psychology of religion interested in missionary actions can make a contribution to finding out exactly what these skills are and where they can be developed.

Missionary ideology openly assumes that there are plenty of people "out there" in the world who are somehow "messed up" and in any case are not on the "right path." The direction in which they are heading needs to be changed and adjusted to the direction of the Christian faith. Missionary action is aimed explicitly at adjusting other and foreign beliefs to one's own. When missionary actions are approved of and performed, the belief and knowledge of others, their thoughts, feelings, wishes, and actions seem undesirable, in need of improvement, and at times plain completely wrong. Why else would one want to engage in missionary action?

In a very specific way, missionaries have committed themselves to strive for an "equilibrium of self and environment." They resist the prevalent moral credo calling for an all-embracing and often even unconditional respect, tolerance, and esteem of the other. Missionaries take a different view: in their eyes others exist to be changed, and all that is foreign is potentially threatening and should, if incompatible with Christian beliefs, be incorporated into the own culture and mind. The community of believers of the one and true God is to be strengthened, its numbers increased. Though employing any and all means is no longer justified to achieve this end, expansion still remains the command and the calling.[22] Persuasive forms of speech are considered "peaceful" missionary means, as are performative inclusions of the other culture in one's own (e.g., in rituals or services). The convert is given a new social identity (for this term, see Tajfel, 1978, 1981).

Missionary action depends on persuasive communication because of structural reasons that have to do with the nature of religious (Christian) belief. Missionary communication is aimed at "making the other one's own," at an assimilation of the other into one's own system of belief, a process that cannot but help involve violence. Missionaries might respect others' freedom of will and emphasize the voluntary nature of faith. Nevertheless, it is the very free will of the other which is the object of missionaries' exerts of influence and strategic manipulations. Religious belief is not conveyed through sensible argument alone. Conversions are not the results of pure rational decisions. No one remains true to his or her religion or faith because mind and reason tell him or her to do so

[22] This includes an assertion of self and a kind of "self defence": the command to love the next man and woman, to love even one's enemy, can become a revolutionary gesture, but there still are adversaries and enemies to be resisted and to be contained (Boesch, 2005, p. 256)

(although there might be good rational reasons for remaining a believer, too). World views, just like religious systems of beliefs, are based upon "strong" values and evaluations (Taylor, 1976, 1977/1985; Rosa, 1998, pp. 99–126) that elude purely rational discourse (Joas, 2003). Still, they are not entirely nonrational or irrational constructs. Not all their aspects defy reason, and neither do those people who are not religiously "intuned". In no case religion is a *mere* expression of an "infantile regression" (Freud, 1927/2001), rooted in the desire for illusions, or in a fearful personality that reduces complexity and contingency whenever there is the chance to do so. Such psychological or psychoanalytical explanations are not sufficient. They don't do justice to faith and believers.

Religious convictions are part of a rather practical world-view. They imply a complex system of *epistemic commitments*. Sedmak (2003, p. 68ff) explains this system by differentiating between three kinds of implicit commitment: holding a religious conviction may ensue in, or entail *praxeological*, *categorical*, or *propositional* commitments. One can relate to those commitments *by virtue of one's capacity to reason* (and say more than just "yeah Amen," or shrug, being at a loss of how to respond). Like other convictions, religious beliefs are structured holistically: they depend on an entire pragma-semantical network that can change as a whole and even break apart if one single conviction is altered. It is important to note that systems of religious convictions *change* and *oscillate*[23] between belief and rationally accessible knowledge. Missionaries "know" all that and act accordingly.

None of this can be considered *a priori* as "bad" or "condemnable," nor is it even very unusual behavior (exclusively performed by ambitious missionaries). What we have just explained about the way missionaries use (inter)religious communication, *mutatis mutandis* is true for all kinds of interpersonal communication. Why shouldn't people try (or subconsciously want to work towards) changing their counterparts according to their own will and wishes? That is what they are, in any case, doing everywhere, and using persuasive and other manipulative means at that. The other is not always just as one wants him or her to be, no matter the current emphasis on the "other's other" and the fashionable appreciation for "strangers" and all that is "foreign." The other may be however he is, and barring exceptional situations of overwhelming generosity, he will never be as he should be, and he never can be. Just as with everything else on earth, the other will never match the perfection we imagine and desire.

This is not only a view missionaries take when they direct their actions at this rarely consciously articulated desire, towards this wish that we are not likely to admit to ourselves in this "age of ever-present demands for tolerance." In our

[23] As has been demonstrated in recent studies analyzing speech, cp. Sedmak, 2003; Schärtl, 2003; Von Stosch, 2003.

imagination, the other undergoes speedy adjustments, and it is this imagined "changed other" who moves us and guides our actions (in the same way as other phantasms do). More often than not this happens unconsciously. This process, too, can be described "positively": people will just not leave each other "in peace". They are not completely indifferent to each other. It is usually considered an unmistakable sign of a real conversation, of a meaningful dialogue or diapraxis when neither of the participants comes out the same as he or she went in. The changes may be subtle, a broadening of horizons, perhaps barely perceivable shifts or openings in the former boundaries of the self. These changes may well correspond with one's own wishes and will. At least in retrospect, changes of the self may be welcomed and accepted even when they were initiated or even strategically planned by other people. Given the fact that a variety of influences are so commonly exerted by others, no one raises fundamental moral objections to them. In any case, it is not possible to completely avoid such influences altogether.

Missionaries openly profess to making use of such influences. They consciously intend the conversion of other people. They have a clear goal, a tried and tested plan, helpful techniques, and usually a lot of passion and patience. A certain sense of self-righteousness adheres to their actions that many contemporaries are unwilling to accept. Last but not least, this has to do with the absolute claims made and enforced by religions, monotheistic religions in particular (Assmann, 2006).

It may seem at times that many religiously motivated people resist a way of thinking that struggles for peacefulness and appeals to sensibilities of difference and empathy,[24] to the capacity for tolerance and the potential for acceptance by all inhabitants of a multicultural "world society." Missionaries and their intellectual justifications do not really fit into today's popular and uncontested dictum of "live and let live," even less so when this dictum is interpreted to mean a radically aesthetisized and individualized hedonism. Perhaps none of the influential world religions or any other pious community will subscribe to the motto of "Do as you please." Some religions and many believers even have a hard time expressing serious respect for and tolerance of "the other others" or strangers (for the concept of "tolerance" see Bobbio, 1990; Walzer, 1997), and, instead, exercise some form of patronizing and derogatory tolerance. This is very evident in our interviews, too, even though the narrators speak very positively about respect, tolerance, and appreciation.

Missionaries and their actions cast a shadow that threatens to undermine their own ethical and moral claims. They are caught in an irredeemable, structural

[24] About this highly complex capacity or *potential for action* which needs to be reconstructed as an achievement of culturally conveyed, biographical learning processes, cp. Boesch's remarks dealing specifically with religious belief (2005, p. 74 ff).

paradox: the missionary program of *peaceful expansion* smells of a *contradictio in adjecto*. The declared will to expand one's religion and belief makes it impossible for any missionary action to retain the character of a harmless, innocent enterprise. This becomes more evident the more openly missionary religions pronounce their claim that the "word of God" (or a "comparable" message) is the absolute truth, albeit one that is not wholly accessible to humans. Explicitly expansive endeavors will always be suspected of being about power and domination and not solely about an altruistic moral removed from all the not so selfless intricacies of human nature.

Program and practice of all missionary action are based on the assumption that the planned conversions will enrich and bless the lives of the converted. (Doubts are allowed but only insofar as they do not undermine one of the basic tenets of faith.) Because of the argumentative paradox described above, missionaries are easily suspected of only paying lip service to the ideals of difference, diversity, and plurality, and to basically aiming at the reduction of all others to "one." Missionary action requires the structural attribution of inferiority to the alien other, or at least the assumption that the other being is in need of change. This action vindicates a superiority that is often claimed dogmatically. The status of the chosen few creates hierarchies among human beings. The distance to God is not the same for everyone. Why else would one want to convert others?

These days, official representatives of the Christian churches and millions of their members unanimously pronounce that they do not want to impose or force their beliefs upon anyone. Religious commitments, so they say, can only be made freely and by self-responsible individuals. Faith needs freedom. But this "liberal gesture," and the implicit radical command to appreciate and tolerate all others, is not easily compatible with the call for missionary evangelicalization. Distancing themselves from every form of enforced belief, ambitious Christians – like our interview partners – find themselves in a theoretically and practically conflicted relationship to the missionary call to propagate their (ideally) stalwart belief in the word of their "one God".[25]

Today, it seems to us that there are two kinds of one-sided and wrong interpretations of this conflicted relationship. On the one hand, religions, and missionary-expansionist religions in particular, are at times sweepingly regarded

[25] Pope Benedict XVI provided many examples for this during his visit to Bavaria in September of 2006. He included the Protestants as possible addresses of his *intensified evangelization of the world*, announced both in sermons and in practice. To Protestants he suggested that they change certain elements of their religious beliefs and draw nearer to the Catholic doctrine. – Incidentally, the term mission was never mentioned in the Pope's public speeches, which is no accident. In the last years it was rarely used even in religious (Christian, church) circles, but was pushed aside and replaced by the secular term "development aid" (or similar terms) – a term that the Pope who is strongly interested in evangelization obviously is critical of.

as world-views that necessarily must lean towards violence. (A view that does justice neither to those religions nor their followers.) On the other hand, the above mentioned internal conflicts are marginalized and evened out, thus playing down the *very elements* of religious world-views and belief systems that both in spirit and deed do strongly suggest, or already embody, a certain aggressiveness and (physical, psychological, or symbolic) violence. To equate religion with violence and belief with intolerance is a highly undifferentiated view of things, but it is equally questionable (and dubious) to see in religious belief in general a structural disposition for tolerance, as does, for example, Joas (2003). Let's have a closer look at this very interesting point!

According to Joas' (and Stosch's, 2003) analysis, religious belief and an undeceivable awareness of contingency are inextricably interwoven. The awareness of and even the search for contingency is woven into a central religious action and experience, namely, the prayer. Religion and belief are newly defined by their positive and productive relationship to contingency. This make them integral components of modernity (late, postmodernity), thus giving them a new and contemporary meaning (instead of discarding them as outdated relics of time past, ready to be disposed of once and for all). Whether this suggestion can be accepted needs to be discussed on at least two levels.

First, there are the subtle religious writings and theological texts that suggest and already articulate a certain familiarity with the phenomenon of contingency and the (modern) awareness of contingency. However, it seems to us, that a rather sympathetic interpretation of even those texts is required in order to be able to say with surety that there are "structures deep in the grammatical make-up of the religious convictions of the great world religions (. . .) that render it impossible that these convictions are undoubtedly in effect on the regulative level constitutive of world-views" (Stosch, 2003, p. 125). Nothing is impossible, not even in sacred texts and theological treatises, and even less so because all practical possibilities of reception-turned-into-action depend on "active readers" (Iser, 1990).

Second, there is the biographical religious experience of many normal people, an experience that certainly is very *diverse*, especially in regards to the above mentioned experiences of contingency in prayer and the persistent awareness of contingency of "modern subjects". Not all believers will experience and see things the way Von Stosch does (Schärtl, Joas et al.). To be able to make more detailed differentiations, empirical studies are needed to clarify how *open* to experiences of contingencies and doubts, to concrete, categorizable religious convictions, avowals of beliefs and belief systems, collective and individual experiences, and practices of belief in fact are. At the very least, such studies are needed to examine how a *radical* awareness of contingency and fundamental doubt go together with such *subjective truths* as are also provided (or should be provided) by religious belief in an absolute. Even if no believer could ever ignore

"the insight that his or her form is relative and conditional" (Joas, 2003, p.16), the open (empirical) question remains of what this means for the believer if he or she in fact adheres to this insight and reflects upon its implications and consequences. Even if awareness of contingency and doubt are integral to belief, they will not be equally welcomed by all believers or accepted as constitutive moments of their own religiosity and piousness.

What Joas (2003, p. 16, with Von Stosch, Schärtl et al.) calls, or rather suggests as timely "self-reflection of belief under contemporary conditions of increased contingency" is obviously less of an empirical diagnosis that can be generally applied, but rather a pious hope that likely may only be fulfilled by *some* believers (but perhaps, one may add, hopefully by more and more believers). The conclusion, "that an awareness of the contingency of one's own belief" (Joas, 2003, p. 16) predisposes "towards tolerance between the religions and between believers and non-believers, and towards an ability to endure the conflicts between belief and knowledge within each single believer and within the churches" (ibid.), also, sounds almost too good to be true. It can be assumed that this may also be coincidentally true for a chosen few. But this again is an *empirical* question.

The analysis of the missionary actions of ambitious Protestants presented in this paper rather suggests still assuming *psychologically complex conflicted relationships.* There is no easy peace within the human soul between, on the one hand, the belief and the religious convictions of the believers, and on the other hand, the sometimes very serious efforts to meet alien others with respect, to recognize and tolerate their cultural life forms, their language games, orientations, and practices. What we are dealing with here is rather a conflict that keeps the soul on its feet and at times throws it into arguments and crises. This conflict cannot be resolved. This is also amply demonstrated by our empirical analyses of selected autobiographical narratives of Protestant missionaries. To show respect and tolerance to others is a continual challenge for them. It is up to each individual to meet this challenge. Whether one's own belief is a help or a hindrance cannot be answered today and likely neither tomorrow.

Incidentally, the empirical studies demanded by us would need a prior discussion of the *normative* content of almost all definitions of "religion" and "faith". The normativity of these terms is poignantly obvious, for example, when the authors of the mentioned small volume (Joas, 2003) strive for theoretical analyses and definitions of "religious convictions." When religion and belief are defined as in the above mentioned text, it can only ever come to a good ending – even if once and while the authors admit: "Despite all the life-sustaining power religious convictions can enfold, they also appear to (sic! J.S./M.A.) possess a highly destructive potential" (von Stosch, 2003, p. 104). Significantly, such seeming concessions are always succeeded by statements putting what was just said in relative perspective: "It is however questionable whether what brings terrorists

and politicians to the point of killing other people and themselves, are indeed religious convictions" (ibid.) (Terrorists and politicians? No-one else?) It is such passages where those very normative distinctions come into play, and the true religion, the serious belief and truly religious convictions are distinguished from degenerative blunders who falsely come under same name. Whereas "true" believers experience, acknowledge, and even cultivate the "vulnerability of their own convictions" and of the religious self, the "only seemingly religious people" (von Stosch, 2003, p. 16), that is namely terrorists and politicians, give in to self-misunderstanding and reject what "really" belongs to religion and belief. Such normative distinctions can, phenomenologically and hermeunetically, capture and grasp noteworthy differences in experience. This is beyond dispute. They are doubtlessly important to prevent that all too many things ("religion," "faith") are thrown into one pot. But they also might turn into a performative self-contradiction when they themselves are used to reject and accept, and the eyes are all-too-quickly closed before the "highly destructive potential" of religious convictions (or rather: when this potential is easily moved to the others. The "terrorists" are "outside" and never within. This exterritorialization of evil follows the well-known pattern: The evil-doers are the others, the strangers, the evil, the diseased, the perverted etc.). A psychological analysis that takes serious the *structurally rooted ambivalence* (and polyvance) of religious belief, can be found at Boesch (2005). His view of things allows for a whole range of accentuated distinctions (normative or not) but refuses to give substance to the longing myth or phantasma of a "pure" and wholly "good" religion and religiosity.

We conclude as follows: Autobiographical narratives elucidate values and convictions (of the narrated and narrating self). They explain, although not immediately and not without ambivalence, what the narrator thinks, feels, wishes, desires and strives for, whom or what he feels obligated to. Our interview partners were very clear about one thing: *unconditional* recognition and tolerance of alien others is not "their thing". They lived and are still living in contexts that have almost constantly been shaped by experiences of cultural difference. Even today, our interview partners are engaged in an intense struggle with these experiences, and in this they are likely fulfilling many requirements of "interculturally competent" action.[26]

The normative values associated with this wide spread theoretical concept are at the most partially shared by missionaries. With respect to social norms and values, intercultural competence means or implies, among many other things, perceiving and accepting the alien other, members of other cultures in general, as they are and on their own terms. But this obviously contradicts the believers' missionary ambitions. Which does not mean that we should at once doubt their

[26] For the term "intercultural competence," cp. Straub, Weidemann & Weidemann, 2007.

"intercultural competence." Rather, we should ask ourselves whether those of us from the relevant scientific communities are truly prepared today to clearly define what we mean when we talk about "intercultural competence," and whether we, in light of the infinite features of specialized fields of actions and particular areas of life, will ever be able to come up with a general definition of intercultural competence.[27]

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[27] The intention to develop an "empirically grounded," differential conceptualization of "intercultural competence" (with respect to various specific domains) is central for the research program and empirical research projects of the interdisciplinary *Graduate School on Intercultural Communication/Intercultural Competence*, located at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (Essen, Germany) and the the Philosophical Faculty of the Chemnitz University of Technology (Chemnitz, Germany). (The Graduate School is supported by the Hans Böckler Foundation [Düsseldorf]; for further information see: http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/phil/ikk/gk/ [last access: 15.01.2007]).

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